The Venus Trap

By

Alex Jahans

Prologue

Falling. Crashing. Burning. Screaming. The entirety of reality flickered with ethereal energy. This was the end.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!”

“No, it cannot end this way!”

Glub! Floosh! Bleeding out. Time’s up. Time to die.

“I don't die so easily!”

A cold wind blows a gale.

“Alright. You win this round.”

***

The video call ends.

A young woman, now old from her experiences, turns to address her robotic kidnappers. “Sorry, boys, I played you for fools. The Farsh-nuke isn't made obedient by threats, he's made revolutionary. And now it's time for you to die.”

The great septagonal machine cries out. “But you are his woman! He will obey us to protect you.”

The woman laughs. “I am my own woman and my name is Lucy. Time's up, tin man.”

Fwoosh!

A flash of blinding logic vaporised reality.

***

The Farsh-nuke stood before a distortion in reality. One sharp dressed man before all of infinity.

The sound of screaming filled the air.

He chuckled sadly. “The fate of the world or my mind and gender. Unleasher, whoever you are, you laid the perfect trap.”

The Farsh-nuke straightened his tie, wiped his nose and pushed his glasses further up his nose.

“Here's to swimming with bow legged women.”

He stepped through the distortion in reality and screamed as his mind was scrubbed clean and his body was remade.

***

A university graduate sat at a bench playing Angry Birds on her iPhone when she got a text. “Hey, Gal, you going to BED tonight?”

Galla texted back. “Soz, Lau, gotta do a shift tonight. Cathy's ill.”

Galla put her phone in her hipster jeans pocket, started strolling by the lake and pulled her hoodie tighter around herself as the spring chill made her breath steam.

A 10 year old boy in school uniform cycled past. “Hey, fatty, what you doing tonight?”

Galla rolled her eyes and ignored the idiot.

The lake was about the size of two or three football pitches but it bent and warped so you were never quite sure how big it was. At semi regular intervals fisherman could be seen camped out by the water's edge and a couple of small yachts were almost always visible in the centre of the lake. Galla wondered what good a boat was in a lake if you had to take a boat just to get there. That question niggled her at night sometimes. The idea that lakes were filled with monsters was not a new idea. There was Loch Ness of course and that atrocious film Shark Night had made hay of the possibility that sharks could be dumped in a lake for sinister purposes. An idea that wasn't so insane considering Bull Sharks could live in fresh water and anonymous message board users were capable of great and terrifying things when they put their minds to it. Who's to say that someone didn't just anchor their yacht up late one drunken night and head out for a skinny dip then meet their grizzly end?

Galla shook her head and chuckled under her breath. Sharks were not the monsters they were seen as by the media. It was a stupid idea. But still she shied away from the water's edge. Just in case.

The walk home took 30 minutes and her house was a large semi detached cottagey building where nature had almost overtaken the architecture. Galla banged the knocker and a short plump woman with shoulder length curly hair answered the door then hugged her by way of greeting. “Galla, dear, how was your first shift at Waitrose?”

Galla sighed and followed her mother in through the hallway to the living room. She explained as she went. “Not bad. I mean I made some mistakes and there was this one customer who got quite irate about how the car park was designed, as if I could do anything about it, but in general the work wasn't too bad and most of the customers were okay. Even the sleazy kids who tried to flirt with me were at least civil.”

Galla's mum entered the living room with two mugs of tea. “Well that's too bad. People should know you're not in charge of car parks but at least you're having a good time and making money.”

Galla sipped at her tea, the liquid was still scolding hot but she could tell her mum had made it early and let it sit so Galla wouldn't have to wait so long for it to enter the drinkable temperature range. She placed the mug of tea on a coaster then asked. “Where's Cheryl?”

Galla's mum frowned and put down her tea. “I do wish you'd stop calling her that. She's your mum too you know?”

Galla licked her lips thoughtfully and grimaced. “I know, mum. I respect your decision to leave dad and Cheryl's a great woman but it would just get needlessly confusing if I called you both mum.”

Galla's mum looked away to where one of the house's five cats was chasing its own tail. “If that's the reason why then call me by my first name and call her mum.”

Galla blurted. “But you're my mum, mum, it wouldn't feel right.”

Galla's mum leaned back and sipped her green tea, smiling with satisfaction at having won the argument.

Galla stared at her mother and her blood started racing. She downed her tea and stormed out of the living room, deftly silent. The sound of laughter followed Galla as she headed up the stairs towards the indoor gym.

Cheryl was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt as One Direction played through speakers, she was on the cross trainer and took a deep breath every time she took a step. She sounded like Darth Vader in a high speed chase.

Galla stared at the sixty year old woman who had dieted and exercised and got plastic surgery to be almost but not quite as fit as an active twenty year old. There was no denying that Cheryll was an upgrade from her elitist sexist and thoroughly overweight and balding father.

“Yes?” hissed Cheryl. “I could hear your dumpy foot steps coming up the stairs from here, what do you want?”

Galla swallowed. “I got a phone call from Cathy, I need to do her shift for her at the Kyber Pass”

A Cheshire cat smile spread across Cheryl's face. “And you want me to give you a lift in my nice Porsche SUV?”

Galla coughed. “If that's a problem-?”

“No. No problem. But it will cost you.”

Galla stared at the back of Cheryl's head. What was it they said about fey creatures? Don't ask for anything, don't eat anything and don't accept anything. Every sign of hospitality is the signing of a contract you don't know the terms of.

Cheryl laughed. “I swear I can feel your eyes boring into the back of my head. Don't worry, I'm not about to make you scrub my butt plugs or anything. I just want you to try my weight loss products.”

Galla sneered. “I am not fat.”

Cheryl chuckled. “Your BMI would disagree, darling. Last I heard you were clinically obese.”

Galla gritted her teeth. “So is everybody. My point is that I'm not fat enough to look bad and I'm fit enough to do what I need to do.”

“So you won't be taking that lift then?”

Galla stormed out and entered her own room.

An elderly cat lay stretched out on Galla's bed and meowed affectionately as she entered. Galla had

found her as a stray wandering the university campus then took her to the RSPCA who announced that she wasn't microchipped and clearly needed a loving home so Galla took her in and named her Uni after where she found her. They'd been together five years now and the elderly cat had been more loving than any of her boyfriends or girlfriends.

Galla lit up upon seeing her favourite moggie and spent five minutes just stroking and scratching the dear cat before booting up her laptop and checking out Facebook. Apparently Cathy's relationship with Steve was now complicated after he punched her when she pretended to go mad and try to stab him as an April Fool. Laura was excited about having booked plane tickets for San Diego comic con and Sandra, her back up girlfriend in case asexuality didn't pan out for her, was busy putting together a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. Galla let Sandra know that she'd be up for the campaign and would fill any role that was needed, provided she could fit the schedule round her work.

Checking her email Galla discovered that her video of her feeding the ducks at the lake was filled with comments from people asking, demanding and threatening to rape her. Yawn!

Finally Galla opened GIMP and continued work on her latest commission, a piece of art blending together every single instance of a certain company's logos, slogans and advertising posters.

She worked for four hours then scoured twitch for a live stream of a game she liked. At last she found one of Call Of Duty but the let'splayer had a bit too much cleavage so the picture in picture was rather distracting but at least he was funny.

At 10pm she headed off through the estates to the Khyber Pass and nothing much seemed unusual. It was cold and dark and she got the feeling that it was rather too quiet at times but that was Woking.

Nothing seemed unusual during her shift at the Kyber Pass either. A bit of thunder, a bit of lightning. They called them April Showers for a reason so Galla wasn't worried. Not even when Karen, the local ufo nut, exclaimed that she'd just observed instances of ball lightning and cold spots.

At 2 am the customers had left and the weather was getting very stormy so her manager shut up shop and shooed her out.

Cars slewed wildly in the rain and joggers ran slightly faster than usual. It started to hail.

Galla shoved her hands into her pockets and breathed through her jacket, the reflected heat of her breath keeping her warm. It was a bit annoying navigating the hills and country roads in the rain but Galla had climbed water slides as a kid, it'd take more than a spot of dodgy weather to rattle her.

A great gale blew and one by one the starts started to wink out of existence until at least the sky turned dark. Galla didn't notice. How often do you look at the sky anyway? Especially when you have places to be and are traversing a route you'd made so often it was muscle memory. It was a shame Galla wasn't watching the skies really. If she did she might have noticed the great blackness of space turn a steady shade of lime green.

Back at the house, the power was gone.

Galla knocked on the door.

No answer.

She waited five minutes in the wind and the rain before losing patience and unlocking the door with her keys and going in. “I'm sorry I'm using my keys mum but it's blowing a bloody gale out there!”

No answer.

Complete darkness inside the house.

No sounds.

No sound of computer fans humming.

No sound of fluorescent lights buzzing.

No sound of the dehumidifier.

No sound of the fridge or freezer.

No sound of the fish tank mechanism.

Not even a chirping of crickets or the fluttering of moths.

Just the sound of the storm outside.

Galla stared into darkness and thought she could make out the figure of a man with a sinister smile approaching her, duct tape held between his hands like garotting wire or a smothering pillow.

She blinked away the memory.

Probably just a power cut and the mothers were out checking the other houses in the area.

Galla used her phone as a torch to help her find her way to the kitchen and light a candle.

By candle light Galla did some sketches and read some more of her book.

At 3am she cleaned her teeth and went to bed, remembering to extinguish the candle.

That night she dreamed of death and dying. Of an incomprehensible war and untold monstrosities but most of all she dreamed of a woman. The woman. And heard someone or something cry in a language she knew was utterly alien, yet understood perfectly. “Mother!”

She awoke to find the house empty and devoid of power.

Okay, so climate change had clearly caused some dangerous storms and the power was more severely damaged than she thought. Maybe Mum and Cheryl had taken refuge somewhere.

Not to worry, Galla would just walk into Goldsworth Park and buy some barbecue or camping supplies. She just needed to make food for herself without reliance on power for the next couple of days. No big deal.

So she got some basic survival gear together and started walking towards Goldworth Park.

Upon arrival at the lake Galla noticed the rather disquieting lack of animals. Not even pigeons could be seen.

Then a voice cried out. “Bit like a zombie horror movie ain't it!?”

Galla snorted at the sharp dressed blond woman before her. “Thanks, because I really needed another reason to go indoors, guzzle a bottle of paracetamkol and knock back some vodka. Who are you anyway?”

The sharp dressed woman reached out her hand. “I am Sister Lucille Danse of the Sylph Liberation Front, I trained the messiah and I saved us all from the Septagonoids and the Farsh-nuke. I'm a sort of inter-dimensional crusader of justice.”

Galla stared at the woman. “Oh... Kay… Lucy, do you happen to know if Waitrose is open?”

Lucy nodded and folding her arms defensively. “Yuh, we're the only two living things that I've seen, unless you count plants or fungi.”

“Shit.” hissed Galla under her breath.

“Oh, you noticed that too? And the sky? What colour is it?”

Galla shrugged. “Green, and? I mean climate change is a bitch, we know this.”

Lucy smiled. “That's very true, where are you going?”

Galla glared at Lucy. “To get supplies from Waitrose.”

“I'll join you.”

Galla shrugged. “Free country.” She continued walking.

Lucy followed.

When they got to Waitrose they found everywhere shut and without power.

Galla looked to the cars in the car park and said. “See, if this was the apocalypse why there still cars here?”

Lucy nodded then asked. “But why is there a lake without any fish? Why there houses but no people? Why are there signs of life but no life itself?”

Galla bit her bottom lip then said. “There's us.”

“Why?”

Galla looked away then sighed and said “I don't know why I'm listening to you. You're clearly just some delusional playboy bunny. Go back to your billionaire boyfriend, I'm sure he has a plinth for you to stand on.”

Lucy laughed. “That's funny. Really. But I need to know you will listen to me if shit comes to fuck

so I'm very sorry but it's time to cheat."

Galla watched as Lucy's right hand delved inside her suit jacket and for a heart stopping moment she thought the woman was about to withdraw a gun or a knife. Instead Lucy retrieved a wooden door nob with a red button on it.

Lucy held the door knob in the air and pressed the button. A door and frame grew from out of the door knob to stand in the middle of the carpark. Lucy turned the door knob and pushed.

Galla didn't believe what had just happened until she followed through.

An art deco minimalist cathedral sized control room is not what Galla had expected to find when she walked through the door.

Galla stammered. "It-It's another dimension."

"Yup." said Lucy nonchalantly.

"You're an alien." said Galla.

"Well, more of a genetically altered human from a different universe but yeah, basically."

"How does this work?"

Lucy shrugged. "You know how string theory theorises that reality is all just strings vibrating at different frequencies? Well this is like hacking reality. But by all means call it magic if that's easier. I should stress that even I don't know how most of this stuff works. I just have friends in high places."

"So this really is a zombie apocalypse?" asked Galla

"Nah, I was just testing you. I don't know what the cause is but I do know I'm your best chance to fix this."

"So what do we do?"

Lucy leaned toward Galla and whispered in her ear. "We walk."

Galla stared at Lucy. "That's your grand plan!? Walk!?"

Lucy shrugged. "Best way to get an overview of the situation. See how far this extends."

"Okay, well... We're just by the Basingstoke Canal if you want to walk into Woking?"

"Fantastic, lead on, Watson"

Galla exited the - Whatever the hell that was - and started heading across the car park as Lucy pressed the button on the door handle and stowed it in her jacket pocket again.

Chapter 1
The Woking Dead

Galla and Lucy walked through the estates over to the bridge leading to the Basingstoke Canal.

“Why are the stairs all slanty and angled?” asked Lucy.

Galla shrugged. “I don't know, I'm not an architect, but it is easier to carry bikes across and it's quite a view at the top”

Lucy bounded up the steps easily. “It's just a view of the motorway.”

Galla groaned. “Some of us aren't genetically enhanced playboy bunnies you know?”

Lucy sighed and rolled her eyes.

Galla pulled herself up the steps then leaned on the railing and panted. “Breath taking, isn't it?”

Lucy stared at Galla, “It's just a road.”

Galla shook her head. “No, this is Lockfield Drive. This is the life blood of suburban villages in Woking. Horsell. Knaphill. Goldsworth Park. Sodding Brookwood. They all depend on this road to ferry them into the city and tourists out to them. Without this, those towns and villages die, like muscles starved of oxygen.”

“Well the blood's not pumping now is it?” asked Lucy, with an arched eyebrow.

Galla stared at the road. “No. No, it isn't. All those cars are just stuck there, nobody within them, no sign of panic, all animal life just gone. Fucking creepy.”

Lucy looked Galla up and down, assessing her. “Got a problem with that?”

Galla turned from the railing and narrowed her eyes at Lucy. Hands clenched into fists at her sides. “Yes, I've got a problem with that. This crap hole of a city is my home.”

Lucy backed away nervously. “H-hey I-I didn't mean to offend you.”

“Pro tip...” said Galla, cracking her knuckles and cricking her neck. “Watch where you're going. There's stairs down, leading to some brambles, behind you.”

Lucy nodded. “Good point, well made!” She turned to rush down the stairs.

Galla skipped down the stairs and bounded before Lucy. “This way for dog turds, joggers and phantasmal cyclists.”

As they started walking along the Basingstoke Canal Lucy asked. “Really? You get phantasmal cyclists?”

Galla nodded. “They really do come out of nowhere”

Lucy paused and arched an eyebrow before she shrugged and continued to follow Galla.

“So, what's a sylph?” asked Galla.

Lucy frowned. “You don't want to know. What about you, what's your story?”

Galla laughed. “Oh, you really don't want to know that.”

Lucy shrugged. “So this is us, the women with no names.”

Galla spat into the canal in disgust. “We are not cowboys. We're better than that. Sodding boys. Playing at being heroes, murdering everyone they see that they don't like and their great paragon, the beloved British role model, the man who never carries a gun, is a serial womaniser who commits genocide at the drop of a hat. If that's who boys are supposed to look up to, if that's their idea of a good man, no wonder they're all such assholes.”

“Hey now, why don't you simmer down? Sexism is a two way street.”

Galla barked a bitter laugh. “For what men do to us, they're lucky we don't murder them in the street.”

Lucy stopped walking and pulled a revolver from her jacket. “I'm sorry.” She whispered as she started to load the revolver. “But I just sacrificed my life and everything I loved to end a sexist dystopia. I won't let that happen again.”

A great shark launched itself from the water and grew arms and legs by the time it hit the ground. The beast effortlessly snapped Lucy's neck and carried her body with it as it leapt backwards into the water.

“You know I've been thinking, what if the cause isn't zombies but like plants? I mean Surrey is the greenest county in England, if plants did this they would be able to do it so quickly.” said Galla, then she heard the splash.

Galla looked behind her and saw Lucy was gone.

She shrugged. Misogynist bitch probably couldn't bare the truth. C'est la vie.

Galla was about to turn when she saw the ripples originating from the middle of the lake and heard a rhythm of two play in her head.

She ran.

She sprinted.

Amazing how fast you can run when pain is secondary to staying alive.

Then she saw the low bridge and pulled her hoodie over her head, at the last minute she turned and leapt.

She saw the shark's jaws bearing down on her and raised her arms.

Smack!

Crack!

The hoodie cushioned the fall enough that Galla didn't black out.

She skidded backwards through the narrow pass beneath the bridge.

The shark landed on top of her but was so big and the underpass so narrow that the shark's dorsal fin got caught.

Galla lay there panting for a few moments as the shark tried to squirm towards her.

An explosion rang out and blood erupted from the shark's back.

Then after three seconds another explosion rang out.

Then another.

Now Lucy was standing astride the shark, revolver pressing into the shark's wound.

“Now I'm not sure but I think those three shots bought me nine seconds. I have 3 more rounds loaded in my gun. Nine more seconds. I think that's enough time to get out my longsword but I'm not sure. Do you want to try me?” said Lucy sternly.

Galla gaped. “You're diplomacising the shark?”

“Oh, this is no mere shark.” said Lucy. “This is a wereshark and if I'm not very much mistaken, the queen of the weresharks. I could recognise her anywhere. Her blood runs through my veins, that's why I didn't die when she snapped my neck just now. I spoke to her through the blood and she granted me, and all other sylphs who are also weresharks, a reprieve from the blood lust and desire for domination of the weresharks. I thought we had an understanding.”

The shark squirmed and shrank, an overweight ginger woman in its place. She said “I'm sorry, I did not know. I was in the middle of a battle to welcome orcs into our great collective when I appeared here. So I resorted to instinct, started cruising this canal in hopes of finding something to eat.”

Lucy sneered. “Oh, did you?”

The Queen of the Weresharks sighed. “I'm sorry. Kill me if you wish but I think we both know you need me. This little one is easy prey and you are not so tough yourself.”

“Says the woman whose life is at my mercy.”

The Queen of the Weresharks grabbed Lucy's foot with her left hand and spun, her right hand grabbed the back of Lucy's head and smacked Lucy's face into the side of the bridge. She sat on Lucy's legs and her left arm pressed against Lucy's neck, holding her to the ground as the Queen of the Wereshark's right hand grew claws and became muscly and hairy. The right arm plunged inside Lucy's chest and pulled out a still beating heart. The Queen of the Weresharks took a bite then spat into the canal.

“You are one of my children and you have the abilities of the sylph and the Logicio but the Farsh-nuke tamed you too well. You will not use the power my blood gives you. You prefer to be passive and submissive. That will get your friend killed!”

“Point made.” said Lucy through gritted teeth.

Galla vomited into the canal.

The Queen of the Weresharks smiled. “I fear your friend is of too weak a constitution to bare my human body as it is. I will return to the water and swim beside you. Better to surprise any would be attackers anyway.”

The Queen of the Weresharks fell beneath the water and Lucy lay panting as her wounds knitted themselves back together.

Galla said bitterly. “I don't think I want to know your backstory”

Lucy rolled onto her belly then got to her feet and pulled Galla up.

The pair walked along the Basingstoke Canal and swapped anecdotes about their fandoms, interests and hobbies.

At one point Lucy said casually. “You know I was going to shoot you back there. That's when the Queen of the Weresharks surprised me, and why I had the revolver to hand.”

Galla shrugged. “You trying to kill me meant you were in a position to save my life. I think that makes up for it.”

Lucy stared at Galla. “Really? It doesn't change anything? What did you experience for it to not change anything?”

“You do not want to know” said Galla.

The walk was uneventful the rest of the way and they arrived at Brewery Road car park to find the same signs of desertion.

As they stood at the car park surveying the scenes they heard a cough from the canal. “The rest of the way is on foot isn't it?”

“Yeah.” said Galla. “Is that a problem?”

Lucy sighed. “She needs clothes. You don't want to see a naked wereshark in human form.” Then she started to strip.

Galla backed away from Lucy nervously and cried. “Woah! Woah! What are you doing?”

Lucy dropped her trousers and explained. “I am a sylph. My body was designed to let me wear a bikini in the Arctic and guess what item of clothing I always have on me?”

Galla looked away in disgust. “Zarquon, when I said you were a playboy bunny I wasn't being serious!”

Lucy laughed and slipped on the bikini, her shoes, socks and suit jacket then tossed her clothes into the canal.

The Queen of the Weresharks rose out of the water wearing the suit and asked. “Why do you have a belt and braces?”

Lucy shrugged. “Always good to have a backup”

Galla sighed. “Whatever, lets get going. We have an apocalypse to investigate.”

They crossed the road and strode into town.

“Oh look, the fountain is still running.” said Lucy.

“Probably on an isolated circuit.” said the Queen of the Weresharks.

As they passed the council offices, the theatre and the library, Galla noticed something flitting about at the edge of her peripheral vision. Then they entered the town square and Galla noticed the angel atop the war memorial was missing.

She cried out. “Shit!” and blinked.

Galla stared at the angel from atop the war memorial as it stood frozen before her, arms outstretched.

Galla reached out her hands to stop her associates from advancing further then said loudly but calmly. “Do. Not. Blink.”

Lucy peered at the statue. “Well would you look at that? Quantum locked.” Lucy pulled a small metal wand from her inside jacket pocket and aimed it at the angel. “Quantum Locked meet the Quantum Oscillator, should have you out of there in a jiffy.”

Lucy fiddled with the settings of the wand then a beam of green energy zapped the angel.

The angel screamed. She screamed for five minutes. Then she said quietly. “Thank you.” She lowered her arms. “We did not choose this life. Kill us. Kill us all.”

The Queen of the Weresharks casually disembowelled the angel and she crumbled to the floor in agony.

Galla groaned. “Do you have to keep doing that?”

The Queen of the Weresharks shrugged. “You're the leader with knowledge local, she's the wizard controller with knowledge planar and I'm the fighty guy. This is what I do.”

“Right.” said Gala. “Well, in that case let's tour the city.”

So they toured Woking, scouring the peacocks, Wolsey Place and the market.

“You know what's weird?” asked Lucy.

“That a kids' TV monster just tried to kill us?” asked Galla.

“That the Queen of the Weresharks, a sylph and a 20 something university graduate have been brought together by chance and are seemingly the only beings left alive.” said the Queen of the Weresharks

“That the people and the animals didn't just leave, they left mid-action, Like you, Mother of the

Blood, they all just vanished as they were doing things.” said Lucy. “Look there! A mop and bucket lying in the middle of floor. There, a bag of sweets just lying on the floor as if dropped and there, a KFC Bargain Bucket a chicken leg not far from it, clearly half eaten. Whatever happened, happened at once, everywhere.”

Galla nodded. “I see your point but how? Could that ship of yours materialise around everyone?”

“Well yes but not to the exclusion of objects in the hand. The default matrix isn't so primitive.” said Lucy.

“Blood control.” said the Queen of the Weresharks. “It's how I freed the sylphs from the urge to dominate and spread the genes through infection. Just grab onto the blood of a common ancestor and give it a yank.”

“So you could do this?” asked Galla.

“Of course not.” said the Queen of the Weresharks incredulously. “I am not able to manipulate reality but if you had the power you could use blood control to isolate a particular genus.”

“Which you could then teleport with the appropriate technology.” said Lucy.

“So why am I still here?” asked Galla.

“Look, sod the walking. This is an apocalypse. Who’s for stealing a bus and driving to Guildford?” asked Lucy.

“If you know how to drive a bus, then I would gladly travel in such comfort.” said the Queen of the Weresharks

Galla snorted.

Lucy clapped her hands. “Excellent, then it's agreed. Galla, can you lead us to the bus depot?”

Galla shrugged. “I think so.”

So they walked to the bus depot, delaying by 45 minutes as a result of Galla almost continually getting lost.

“It's okay, I know the way now.” She would always say as they headed down yet another wrong turning.

When they at last approached the bus depot Lucy said. “Okay, Rule One: Stay behind the wielder of the wand that can rewrite reality. I once accidentally turned a man who was trying to chat me up into a woman when he stepped in front of me as I was reversing the polarity of a set of traffic lights.”

Galla patted Lucy on the back. “Maybe you are my kind of woman after all.”

The Queen of the Weresharks groaned. “Not again. If you two are going to have fun with each other, kindly do it when I'm not here. Some of us are still straight.”

Galla bent double laughing.

Lucy ignored the comment and tried not to blush.

The door to the depot sprang open after Lucy waved her wand at it.

The trio walked inside the depot and selected a suitable bus. Lucy hacked it with her wand and they entered.

The Queen of the Weresharks went to sit at the back as Lucy installed herself in the driver's booth.

Galla stood holding onto the rails. “I can just see one small flaw with this plan.”

“Oh?” asked Lucy as she turned the key in the ignition.

“We're inside.” said Galla pointedly.

“Yes.” said Lucy with a smirk. “But I and the Queen of the Weresharks are immortal.”

“I'm not.” said Galla like a clanging anvil.

Lucy shrugged. “Sucks to be you then.”

The bus lurched into life and rammed the side of the building, it came apart like tissue paper and they kept driving.

“You hacked reality didn't you?” asked Galla dryly.

“Pretty much.” said Lucy. “Next stop Guildford.”

The drive took a while but eventually they passed Sainsbury's at Brookwood and left Woking but when they did so something strange happened. They arrived not at a bustling high street of tarmac and cobble but a dusty city of of marble and wood.

“Just taking a wild guess here, but this isn't Guildford, is it?” asked the Queen of the Weresharks.

“No. No, I don't think this is Guildford.” said Galla.

“Curiouser and curiouser.” said Lucy.

Chapter 2
What Do We Do With A Roman Citadel?

“So what now?” asked the Queen of the Weresharks

Galla stared into the distance and asked. “Can that reality hacking doodad scan the area and give us some information?”

Lucy played with her hair thoughtfully then said. “Yes. Yes, I think it can.”

The Queen of the Weresharks rose from her seat and strode to the front of the bus. “Then lets walk.”

“Yeah, I never really liked taking public transport anyway.” said Galla.

The doors squeaked open and Lucy bounded out the door. “Well, come on then, lets explore.”

So they walked in formation with Lucy in the lead. When they reached the first building Lucy scanned it, sniffed it then licked it.

Lucy skipped to the next building, singing a tune from her childhood.

“When there's something strange squelching up your driveway or a monster in you lavvy,
Never fear, the Professor is near.

When he shoots to kill or you're feeling so ill,
Never fear, the Professor is near.

When the universe tears and time corrupts,
Never fear, the Professor is near.

If you break under pressure and kill without thinking,
Then you may fear, the Professor is near.”

Galla watched Lucy bound and skip, her hair flying back like puppy ears, and asked. “How do you do it? Be so goddamned happy all the time?”

Lucy either couldn't hear Galla or was ignoring her.

The Queen of the Weresharks answered instead. “She's a sylph.”

Galla stared blankly back at the Queen of the Weresharks.

The Queen of the Weresharks rolled her eyes then explained. “Long ago there was a brilliant species. A magnificent and resourceful species. They had power and technology to rival the Elder Gods. They knew almost everything about genetic engineering. Then something happened. Some say they simply reached a point where they knew too much and felt a fear us lesser species ignore. Some say they fought a war and it escalated beyond their control. Either way, they ran. They ran and they hid. That wasn't enough though. They needed protection. Protection we could grant. So they figured out a way to make us look after them and keep their species alive no matter the cost.”

Galla's jaw dropped “And that's what Lucy is?”

“No.” said the Queen of the Weresharks with a shake of her head “This species didn't have the time to genetically engineer themselves. So instead they engineered a biological machine whose combined excretions made one of them into a sylph. Then they set a course for a trading station that would likely seize upon the opportunity their species provided and they proceeded to drug themselves. When this ghost ship arrived at the station, the traders tried to sell the sylphs but the stock wouldn't sell, so they started experimenting with the biological machine, trying out its excretions on the different alien species that came to visit. Humans sold well, particularly human females. Then word got out that the Farsh-nuke, one of the Elder Gods, had got a hankering for human female sylphs and desperate inter-dimensional superpowers have been using sylph pills as a way to draw out the Farsh-nuke ever since. Lucy there is just one of many victims.”

Galla was horrified.

“Oh, don't worry. Ahe's happy” said the Queen of the Weresharks. “Her whole body lights up with

joy just being alive. Part of being a sylph. If you're turning your whole species into the perfect cattle, pets and sex slaves you're going to have safeguards in place to stop people committing suicide."

Galla stared at the Queen of the Weresharks then ran to hug Lucy.

Lucy was glomped from behind and asked. "What's up?"

"Oh, you know, whole world dead, don't know how I'm going to eat tonight. The usual." said Galla flippantly. "But really though I wondered if you'd figured out we were in Rome yet?"

Lucy chuckled. "Yes. Yes I had figured that out actually. In fact I can tell you that this place is the western half of the Roman Empire from about 420 CE-ish."

"CE?"

Lucy sighed. "Common Era, it's what us atheists say instead of AD."

"How can you be so accurate?"

Lucy help up her techno-wand. "This baby can do the real life equivalent of pressing F3 in Minecraft."

"Ooh..." said Galla, impressed. "Can it do F5 too?"

Lucy thought for a second, playing with her hair as she did so. "It would explain out of body experiences wouldn't it? Just people accidentally hitting the wrong buttons on the keyboard of reality?"

Galla laughed. "Favourite Roman Emperor?"

"That's a tough one, I think I'd have to say-" Lucy's head exploded in a shower of blood and her body lay twitching on the floor.

Galla turned to look where the shot came from and saw a lone figure in the distance.

She cried out. "It's disembowelling time, Queenie!"

The Queen of the Weresharks changed. Her arms and legs growing as thick as tree trunks, a tail sprouting from her arse and a dorsal fin growing on her back as her mouth developed a smile that grew steadily wider and wider until – her head exploded in a pile of blood and her body collapsed awkwardly.

Galla screamed. "Would you please stop doing that!?"

The figure cried back. "Just protecting myself, Darling! Them weresharks can be mighty vicious!"

"Oh, can they?" muttered Galla irritably before she raised her hands and started walking towards the figure. "Are you going to shoot me?"

"Not if I don't need to, Miss."

Galla smiled. It was the smile of a psychopath who had just been released from their moral code.

As she approached the figure, she saw the figure wore leather riding boots with spurs, dirty blue jeans, a fine duster coat and a stetson. Bullets were worn in a belt around their waist and they held their gun in their left hand.

“That's far enough, lil lady.” said the gun wielder when they were a hundred feet apart.

Galla stared into the face opposite her, into those azure blue eyes and at those long ginger curls.

“Do you know what a sylph is?”

“I do.”

Galla nodded. “That woman I was talking to, she was a sylph.”

Galla's prey took a step backwards. “Hey now, let's not get hasty.”

“You shot her and her head exploded. I will NEVER be able to forget that.”

The gun cocked.

Galla smiled. “I don't think so, honey. My babies aren't dead. They're back there, right now, planning how best to make you suffer. I am you best chance of getting off without torture and death. You need me alive.”

“I'm not afraid.”

“Uh-huh.” said Galla with a curt nod and a lick of her lips. “Then lets talk about the fact that you are trying so hard to be Clint Eastwood when you just don't have the balls.”

The person with the gun flinched.

Galla took a step forward. “What's the matter? Cat got your dong?”

The gun person fired a warning shot over Galla's shoulder. “What did you say?”

Galla took another step forward. “Everyone I have ever known has just vanished and you just decapitated my only companionship in this dong-forsaken wasteland. Tell me why I should care what you think?”

The gun person fired another warning shot. “Because I'm the man with the gun! And stop saying dong!”

“Except you aren't, are you?” said Galla as she took another step forward. “You're the scared little girl in want of a gun”

The gun person stopped firing and just waved the gun at Galla. “I will shoot!”

Galla shrugged and took another step.

Nothing.

Another step.

Nothing.

Galla walked right up to the crying cowboy and took his gun and ammo belt easily.

“I'm sorry, but you shot my friends.” She said gently “Gender is not a matter of biology, it is a matter of who you are inside.”

The gun man lay sobbing in tears, snot running from his nose.

The rage inside Galla's heart melted. “I guess we could do with a sharp shooter in our party, at least for a while.”

“I agree.” said Lucy, now beside her. “And I think between the pair of us, me and the Queen of the Weresharks could make him as tough as us.”

The cowboy sneered. “I don't need your pity, I'm an Architect of Chaos.”

Lucy dropped down onto her haunches and said. “Then how would you like to be even stronger?”

The cowboy looked at her. “Can you give me a dong? Because that's the only thing I need to not crumble like this.”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded. “I control the blood, I can do that.”

The cowboy got to his feet. “Then it's a deal, I will aid you in your endeavours.”

Galla gave the cowboy his gun and they continued walking through the abandoned city.

After a while Galla asked. “What do we do with a Roman citadel? Like what's the point?”

Lucy sighed. “Aye, there's the rub. What do we do with a Roman citadel?”

The Queen of the Weresharks thought for a second. “Yeah, what do we do with a Roman citadel?”

“Early in the morning!” sang the cowboy.

Galla stared at him.

Lucy cracked up at Galla's face.

The Queen of the Weresharks started singing “Oh! What do we do with a Roman citadel? What do we do with a Roman citadel? What do we do with a Roman citadel?”

The Cowboy joined in for the last line “Early in the morning!!”

Galla hissed at Lucy. “I hope you hacked that bus with remote control. I don't know much about history but I gather the Roman Empire was rather big and I am not the fittest individual.”

Lucy winked. “Your wish is my command” Then she aimed her techno-wand far off in the distance

and the bus appeared.

Galla's jaw dropped.

Lucy squeezed Galla's hand. “Anything for you”

Galla visibly jumped back in shock. “I am not – I mean, that is to say -”

“It's okay.” said Lucy with a smile. “I just want you to be happy.”

Galla swallowed and ran to the bus.

“Early in the morning!!!” sang Lucy, the Queen of the Weresharks and the cowboy.

Galla found a seat at the front of the bus and raked her face with her hands.
“You've already got a back up girlfriend if the asexuality thing doesn't work out, Galla. It'd be unfair on her, she's been waiting for so long.” Galla told herself.

“But she might be dead and Lucy is so hot.” Galla reminded herself.

“In which case you'd just be using Lucy which isn't fair on her. That woman deserves true love, not a my-whole-planet-is-dead depression fuck.” Galla decided.

“Early in the morning!!!” sang the trio as they entered the bus.

“Oh yeah, I didn't shut the doors after us.” said Lucy as she climbed into the driver's seat.

The Queen of the Weresharks lead the cowboy to the back of the bus as they sang.

Galla stared out the window and images flashed before her eyes:

The storm.

The green sky.

Inside that spaceship.

The Queen of the Weresharks launching out of the water.

Lucy's heart being exposed and torn in two.
The death of the war memorial.

The wall of the bus depot shattering.

Their first sight of the Roman Empire.

Lucy's head exploding as they talked.

A thirty five year old man with grey hair and some duct tape.

Galla blinked and shook herself. She was stronger than this. She could take it. She'd taken worse. She just hoped Lucy could avoid getting herself mutilated. She felt so sorry for the poor woman

when she found she was a sylph.

“Early in the morning!!!!”

Galla found herself joining in with the song. After all, what else was there? This was her life now. A rag tag bunch of misfits cruising to the end of the Roman empire just to see what was there.

Come night fall they decided to stop and set up camp.

“Ta-da” said Lucy as she pressed the button on the doorknob and opened the door.

The cowboy shrugged. “I've seen better.”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded in agreement. “Definitely seen better.”

Galla glared at them.

“Well I think it's mind blowingly awesome.” said Galla pointedly.

“Thank you, Galla.” said Lucy with a smile. “You may have the top bunk.”

“Oh, thanks.” said Galla.

The cowboy and the Queen of the Weresharks looked to each other then shrugged and entered.

Galla paused at the doorway. “What's the food situation like?”

Lucy grabbed Galla's arm excitedly. “Oh you'll love it. There's an auto cooker. You just select the meal you want and it grows everything needed to create the meal in five seconds, harvests it, prepares it and cooks it.”

Galla stared at her. “Are you serious?”

Lucy nodded.

Galla reached out and grabbed Lucy's arm/ “Never leave me.”

“Haha, It's a deal. Actually...” Lucy pulled out a syringe filled with blood, that was clearly stoppered at the end by a valve through which a needle could be screwed.

“Actually what? Is this where you tell me to hand your blood to a special Doctor so he can clone you?”

“Actually this may help you if I'm not there.” said Lucy carefully. “If you're in trouble and we're not around to help you, inject this into any vein or artery in your body and it will make you like me. You'll be unstoppable.”

Galla nodded and pocketed the syringe as Lucy handed her a pack of hypodermic needles.

Galla entered the ship and ate a Christmass dinner with all the trimmings because “Why the heck not?” then she, the cowboy and the Queen of the Weresharks stayed up talking about the holidays they celebrate until after much merriment they each went off to bed.

Galla woke up feeling completely refreshed and had a nice shower before she ate a full English breakfast and stepped out of the door to find the bus was moving.

Galla asked. “You drove through the night?”

“Yep.” said Lucy. “I mean it'll cost me later but Christ I just needed us to make some progress and here we are, coming up to the edge of the western half of the Roman empire. What do you see?”

“More global warming?” suggested Galla.

Lucy laughed. “Well it's certainly the same stuff. That's called the great green nothingness, or the void between the worlds. That is what the multiverse looks like and that answers one massive question I have had for a long time. We're the ones who were taken, not the ones who were left behind.”

“It's getting closer.” said Galla.

“What is?”

“The end of the world.”

Lucy laughed.

Galla pulled the emergency break.

“Why did you do that?” asked Lucy.

Galla stared at Lucy. “Because a lot has happened to you and anyone would be cracking up under the circumstances.”

“You don't trust me.” said Luc.y

Galla pulled Lucy out of the driver's seat and pushed her towards the ship. “Eat some food and get some sleep, then we'll talk.”

Lucy frowned but obeyed.

Chapter 3
The Summoning

The Queen of the Weresharks exited the bus, followed by the cowboy. She asked Galla. “Why is Lucy entering the ship and why does she look so pissed?”

Galla grimaced and crossed her arms. “She drove through the night to get us across the western half of the Roman Empire and then she threatened to drive off the edge of the world.”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded thoughtfully. “So you pulled the emergency brakes and told her to get some sleep?”

“Well, yeah.” said Galla defensively.

The Queen of the Weresharks sat down in a seat and crossed her arms briefly before deciding to stretch out. “Yeah, you don't do that.”

Galla stared, open mouthed, incredulous then looked to the cowboy.

“You're a human from Woking, she's a wereshark sylph thing with advanced tech and knowledge.” said the cowboy. “No wonder she's pissed off.”

“Not just that either.” said the Queen of the Weresharks. “She's a sylph without a master so she can't properly relax, being a wereshark helps but she's still vulnerable in high stress situations. Fortunately humans are adaptable creatures and from what I gather she had to adapt to cope as an independent sylph under stressful situations for a number of years so she didn't crumble when she drove through the night on her own but that means she was wired and high on her own sense of power and agency when you effectively said you didn't like what she was doing and told her to get back in her box.”

“I never said that!” cried Galla, outraged.

The Queen of the Weresharks narrowed her eyes at Galla. “You told her to go to sleep. Ever had a long day and become enraged about something or drunk too much red bull when an assignment was due. You tell me that if someone suggested you just needed sleep after all that, that you wouldn't have the least bit of difficulty doing so?”

Galla swallowed. “I suppose I'd find it difficult.”

The Queen of the weresharks nodded and looked out the window “Uh-huh, there's a reason people crash instead of cruising to a halt. In high stress situations we push our bodies as hard as they will go. Better to sprint and hurdle for 5 more minutes than spend half an hour laying down talking.”

“Hey guys.” said Lucy as she exited the ship in a new three piece suit, with a futuristic pistol in her hand. “I just remembered I had this. It's a memory gun. You can work the Quantum Oscillator without me now.”

“Err...” said Galla.

The cowboy easily disarmed Lucy while the Queen of the Weresharks guided her to a seat by the window.

“Okay...” said Lucy nervously.

The Queen of the Weresharks leaned over Lucy and tried to look compassionate while pointing out subtly how stupid any rash action would be. “How long has it been since you saw the Farsh-nuke?”

“About a month, why?” said Lucy, studying her fingernails.

“He came to rescue you from me. Mighty powerful man, that one. What happened to him?”

Lucy grimaced and looked at her reflection in the window. “He threatened to destroy the multiverse so I gave my life to make him change his mind.”

Galla stared at her. “You gave your life?”

Lucy looked at Galla and shrugged. “I made the Septagonoids threaten to kill me unless he cooperated with them. Turns out it's not wise to threaten a man who quite literally eats freedom fighters for breakfast.”

“But you didn't die?” asked Galla, confused.

Lucy looked out the window. “The Logicios pulled me out at the last second. Said they could use me. That I showed potential.”

Lucy went back to studying her fingernails. “I knew they just wanted me as a mole. Get me in with a Farsh-nuke so they could use him. That's what you do with boys isn't it? Give them a girl to chase after and watch how they dance.”

Lucy looked Galla in the eyes now. “I told them though, I told them I am not going to manipulate the people I love or fall in love on command. I absolutely would never be some trophy sylph for some high ranking Logicio to pull out at parties. I am better than that. I have saved whole worlds, I saved the Multiverse. I am so much better than any Logicio.”

Lucy was tearing up now and her face was bright red.

The cowboy finished her story for her. “So you swaggered off like John Wayne but all the while you are dying inside because you know something's missing and no matter how much you tell yourself you're fine you can feel that void and it works away at at you, slowly corroding who you are.”

The Queen on the Weresharks placed her left hand on the cowboy's right leg compassionately.

Lucy pulled a hanky from one of her trouser pockets and blew her nose. “But look at me. I'm over-reacting. I mean I lasted 10 years without an owner, I can do it again. I think I'll just go scan outside and get a breath of fresh air.”

Lucy got up and left the bus.

“I'll stand guard.” said the cowboy as he left the bus.

“So...” said Galla.

The Queen of the Weresharks entered Lucy's ship.

Galla followed.

Once inside the vast minimalistic spaceship the Queen of the Weresharks bit her thumb and started drawing symbols in the floor in blood.

“What are you doing?” asked Galla.

“Summoning the Farsh-nuke.” said the Queen of the Weresharks.

“By drawing symbols in blood? This is some supernatural nonsense right here.” said Galla.

The Queen of the Weresharks snorted and explained as she worked. “All myths have a basis in fact. Pentagrams can't summon a demon from hell, but they can summon the mind of one connected by blood if you have a firm enough grasp on the blood. I am the Queen of the Weresharks, I am patient

zero in the Wereshark epidemic and once my blood has a hold of you it does not let go. The Farsh-nuke himself clings to life and power. He is my charge and my heir. Summoning him is easier than booking a Doctor's appointment."

"And by summoning him you mean?"

"He will possess me." said the Queen of the Weresharks. "You will have to ask him what we do about Lucy."

"Well, okay I can see the need for the blood but why such odd symbols?"

"These odd symbols speak to the great trinity of the Weresharks. The Shark, the Wolf and the Maiden. There are sapient sharks who have their own written language called Charicthy and sentient Wolfs called Canids with their own written language. A Charicthan, A Canid and a Canadian could each look at this language and find it recognisable and familiar because it represents the dominant languages of all three species that make up the Wereshark. The act of creating the circle of blood dials in the instructions to my subconscious and that summons the Farsh-nuke to take the place of my consciousness. Like how taking notes in university and writing things down in your exercise books at school isn't because educational institutions are stingy when it comes to printing but because they know the act of writing the information down will make you remember it better."

"Huh." said Galla, impressed. "So this possession, what'll it look like?"

The Queen of the Weresharks sat cross legged in the centre of the bloody diagram and said. "See for yourself." She pulled a special three bladed sword out of her right though and stabbed herself in the hearts with it. She blacked out instantly.

Heat was sucked into the Queen of the Weresharks causing a gale and a cold spot.

The Queen of the Weresharks suddenly took a sharp intake of breath and a terrified voice asked. "Who's there?"

Galla pulled up a chair and sat before the possessed Queen of the Weresharks. "I am Galla Placidia. I am a friend of Sister Lucille Danse of the Sylph Liberation Front, I believe you are her master?"

"Ha." barked the thing possessing the Queen of the Weresharks. "I knew she faked her last name. But I'm not her Master anymore."

"No?"

"No. I killed her and then I died to protect the Farsh-nuke."

Galla was confused. "You're not the Farsh-nuke"

"William Dickson Wright at your service but I understand your confusion. The Farsh-nuke does not exist. Literally. He is made of illogicity. His power comes from his lack of corporeality. The Queen of the Weresharks could no more infect him than she could infect the devil or god. But she did infect me, his host. After I killed Lucy to destroy the Septagonoids I was fatally wounded. I gave my life to let my body live so he might still live." He snorted. "Probably the only truly noble thing I had ever done."

Galla nodded, understanding. “Lucy isn't dead. The Logicios saved her. She's barely 10 metres from us.”

“Really?” said William excitedly. “That's fantastic!”

“Yes, yes it is but right now she is missing her master.”

William frowned. “Aww, Lucy. But I can't help her. I'm just a shadow on the wall.”

Galla returned the frown. “The thing is we don't exactly have the time or resources to let Lucy mourn or get counselling. Something bad and impossible has happened and Lucy is our best chance of figuring it out and putting a stop to it. We need her.”

“I see.” said William and then he cried out. “You have her blood!”

“I don't!” snapped Galla.

“In your pocket. A syringe I'm guessing. About an armful.”

“Yes.” said Galla cautiously.

“Has she flirted with you?”

Galla stared at the possessed wereshark incredulously. “What do you mean has she been flirting with me?”

William nodded. “She has. Good. Now, you, what do you feel about her?”

“I – Well, I, well, I-I, well -” said Galla. She blushed as she stammered.

“Excellent, you clearly fancy the pants off her but care too much about her to make a move and she's already indicated her desires for you. That's enough for me. You say you need her at her best now? Well, I have a solution for you. I spent months and months taming her. Her sylph tendencies have locked onto my logic signature. I can give you what I know and let her instinctively know she can trust you. It's a big responsibility to take on, she may decide she never wants to leave you and I won't lie to you, this isn't a moral action. There are issues involving consent and agency with what I am about to do but since you're already flirting and this is a life or death situation I feel the benefits outweigh the negatives.”

Galla stared at the possessed wereshark, stunned. “Are you the devil?”

William laughed a hearty laugh. “No, I am worse. I am an ordinary human being who was used, manipulated, sent mad and made some terrible decisions. I regret all of them and I am glad that I am dead. What matters is that the woman who reformed me is out there, right now and she needs someone to look after her. If you want to do this without my help, go ahead. I can't stop you.”

Galla chuckled, tearing up. “But if I don't accept your offer I have to somehow flirt a woman who has been through hell into becoming my pet and I don't know if I can do that.”

The cowboy burst through the doors of the spaceship. “She wants you to say yes”

“Pardon!?” said Galla and William together.

“She says she knows what you're doing, that's precisely why she left the bus. And she wants you to do it. She says she knows what you two have will probably be little more than a fling but right now she needs someone to look after her and you need her ready to kick ass, so do it. Say yes.” said the cowboy.

William laughed. “That's my girl, playing me for a fool.”

Galla smiled, a single tear rolling down her right cheek. “I'll do it.”

William nodded, tearing up himself. “Good, then connect an open wound to the blood of the summoning circle.”

Galla picked at a scab on her finger and watched the blood pulse from the wound then rammed the bloody finger against the summoning circle.

***

Lucy was leaning against the bus as she stared off into the green infinity of the multiverse.

Galla swaggered out of the bus in a three piece suit.

Lucy smiled when she saw Galla. “He always did like suits. I think it was something about wanting to play hero. Can't help liking them after a while.”

“Lucy-” Galla began.

“No, don't say anything. You don't need to. Just scratch my back would you?”

Galla dutifully felt around behind Lucy's back until she said. “Right there. Perfect!”

Galla scratched and Lucy groaned with delight.

“That's the thing about being a sylph. So many itches to scratch, not enough hands.” joked Lucy.

Galla laughed.

Then Galla bit her tongue and said. “I wanted to ask you out you know, but I'm trying out not caring about sex and romance at the moment. It was going well. Amazing the time you save, not masturbating.”

Lucy burst out laughing.

“But I guess this is the best of both worlds. I get the companionship of romance without the baggage.” said Galla.

Lucy nodded. “And I have it on good record that I am almost as cute as a kitten.”

“Probably less likely to break my headphones too.” said Galla.

“Ha! Wait, you have a kitten?”

Galla nodded. “An old dear I found as a stray. I took her in and fell in love.”

“So you have experience handling damaged goods then? That's good.”

Galla hugged Lucy and ruffled her hair “You are not damaged goods, you are the woman who saved the multiverse remember?”

Lucy laughed.

***

Inside the spaceship the Queen of the Weresharks was having a bath while the cowboy sat on the toilet talking to her.

“You really think they'll be good together?” asked the cowboy.

“Tale as old as time.” said the Queen of the Weresharks simply. “Enigmatic stranger embroiled in great internal and external conflict seeks a down to earth person to complete them and help them solve their conflicts. First law of life in the multiverse. The laws of fiction govern the laws of reality since everything real must be fictional somewhere and vice-versa. If we hadn't summoned the Farsh-nuke to get them together now then we'd have to wait for the third act of this mystery for them to get it together and I don't want them distracted from the real task of clearing up this mess. Not to mention how much none of us wants the second act, misunderstanding. That's typically when the bad guys win a bit so we need our team unified then.

The cowboy nodded as he lit a spliff and took a long drag. “Yeah, I think you're right, love stories are a pain in the ass.”

The Queen of the Weresharks went back to scrubbing.

The cowboy mused. “Then again if there is someone writing this, then they must have a good strong reason to include this scene of me watching you bathe while we discuss narrative tropes.”

“Nah.” said the Queen of the Wereshark. “I once read a NaNoWriMo piece where these guys had a chase through a portion of the multiverse exactly like a minecraft adventure map called Solar Survival. Poor bugger just needed some padding. That's probably what this is”

The cowboy took a long toke and farted. “You know I think you might be right. Fucking writers.”

Chapter 4
Orcs Must Die

The next morning Lucy stretched and yawned. She rolled over in her bed to find Galla was missing. She looked nervous for a moment and was about to get out of bed when the door squeaked open and Galla entered wearing a mismatched three piece suit.

Galla held a plush velvet box in her hand and approached the naked woman in the bed. “I thought, well, I found this and I thought you might like it?”

Lucy took the box and looked inside. She pulled out a slightly fraying collar. “This, this is the collar William gave me.” She wheezed.

Galla nodded “Lucy Badass, saviour of the multiverse. You ready to take up that mantle again?”

Lucy pulled the collar round her neck and secured it, then she said. “Go have breakfast, then gather the party in meeting room 3B.”

Galla nodded respectfully and left.

***

Galla sat at the head of the table with the cowboy to her right and the Queen of the Weresharks to her left.

The cowboy was explaining/ “So we were surrounded by weresharks -”

The door swung open and Lucy entered carrying a small read faux leather purse. She wore cowboy boots, jeans, a pale blue suit shirt, a paisley waistcoat, a fawn suit jacket and a dark green double breasted long coat that hung two inches lower than the top of her cowboy boots.

“Wow!” said Galla.

The cowboy whistled. “Nice duds!”

The Queen of the Weresharks just smiled.

“First off, sorry for my behaviour. I haven't been myself lately but I know something. We were summoned. All 4 of us, and Woking and the Western Half of the Roman Empire and that angel thing. I don't think it's unreasonable to expect that more people and things will be summoned in so we need to be ready. You all okay with that?” asked Lucy.

The cowboy nodded. “Aye!”

“Of course.” said Galla.

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded.

Lucy gave a half smile. “I'm glad you agree. Now once we have accepted that we will have company then we must also expect that some of it will be hostile. To that end I have raided the stores.”

Lucy pulled out three watch like arm bands and handed them to the cowboy, who passed them round the table. Then she pulled out 3 large two handed guns, gave them to the cowboy for distribution. Same with 3 pistols and three metallic fancy looking rods.

As everybody examined their new toys Lucy explained. “I think the Logicios expected I would get picked up by a warlord so they didn't hand me just any habitation transport. This is a covert ops battlestation. It's designed to gear up 50 soldiers with the technology necessary to enslave a planet. Obviously we're not using that technology because we don't need it and frankly two of you tried to kill me so I don't entirely trust you. No offence.”

“None taken.” said the cowboy.

The Queen of the Weresharks shrugged. “You're a smart girl, Lucy. I trust your judgement. So what do we have?”

“The wrist bands will connect you to the ship and basically act as personal forcefields. They emit a localised logic field about your person that automatically cauterizes wounds and restores damaged tissue. It filters out toxins, poisons and radiation. Should you actually die then it will save your soul or independent logic signature and beam it and your memories into a clone that will be created in this ship. Just like respawning in a video game.” said Lucy

Galla stared at her. “Why do I sense a but coming?”

Lucy rolled her eyes. “Melee attacks can still hurt you and – cauterisation or not – if they decapitate you or destroy your brain you're dead. Well, unless you have some other way around it like me and mother of the blood. If they damage the wrist band you're basically naked. Since we'll be moving I'll have the ship's exterior locked away in my bag so if we all die before the door is open we are trapped inside this ship until one of us figures something out.”

“And the guns?” asked the cowboy.

“Never run out of ammo as long as the ship is within a mile of them. The big guns can stun, turn and kill. The pistols are memory guns, the first round is loaded with the information you need to work everything. You also all have Quantum Oscillators but none of us knows enough to realistically use them for anything more than cheap tricks.” answered Lucy.

The Queen of the Weresharks asked. “Turn? What does turn setting do?”

“Mind rape.” said Lucy bluntly. “A special variant of the sylph pill solution teleported right into someone's brain. With it is a burst of memory gun logic that commands the victim to either await spoken orders, kill their friends or kill themselves. There is no known cure for the condition, they are completely in their attacker's control.”

The Queen of the Weresharks grinned a devilish grin.

The cowboy whistled appreciatively.

Galla declared. “Yeah, we're not using that setting.”

The cowboy looked pleadingly at Galla. “But they're so useful?”

The Queen of the Weresharks looked at Lucy like a slice of frying bacon and fingered the trigger of the gun.

Lucy beamed a big friendly smile at the Queen of the Weresharks. “You'll be pleased to hear that friendly fire is impossible when you're wearing the wristbands and the guns don't work when the wrist bands are off.”

The Queen of the Weresharks chuckled. “You're bluffing.”

“And you're jealous.” said Lucy cheerfully. “To answer your question, Galla, when the odds are against you and survival is at stake, chivalry goes out the window. I loathe the idea that we might have to use these guns in such a manner but if we're going to murder everyone anyway what does it matter?”

A large bell chimed and the lights dimmed.

Lucy swallowed. “That would be company. Memory guns to your heads, now!”

Lucy ran from the room as the Queen of the Weresharks and the cowboy shot themselves.

Galla held the memory gun in her hand and felt its heft. It felt good in her hand, like it belonged. And that worried her.

Galla wasn't a killer. She had no streak of badass within her. She was ordinary. Dull. A pacifist who bleated about genocide and murder but would never actually do anything. She couldn't do this, could she?

Lucy was out there now, fighting for her life.

Galla had sworn to protect Lucy. That's what being her mistress meant. It wasn't all fun and games caring for a sapient pet. Galla had a responsibility to protect Lucy, to look after her and see no harm came to her. At the same time though Lucy was a million times better at protecting herself than Galla was. Galla couldn't even protect Uni.

Uni.

Galla thought of that frightened cat she'd found on the university campus and how she'd run to her for love and affection. Galla had become a crazy cat lady that day, had instantly fallen in love. And now Uni was gone. Mummy was gone and Laura and Cathy were gone. There was only Lucy left.

Galla aimed the memory gun between her eyes and pulled the trigger.

***

Orcs were swarming the bus, battering it with wooden clubs studded with teeth.

The cowboy stood atop the bus, sniping anybody who looked like they might have a range weapon.

The Queen of the Weresharks had transformed into her beast form and was battering anybody who came close. Every now and then she's lunge and scratch with a claw to infect someone.

Lucy was stood outside the bus doors, blasting anyone who came close.

Suddenly she felt a scratch against her left ankle and felt herself grow tired and dizzy. She checked her wrist, the wrist computer was broken. “Mother puss bucket.”

She tried to keep fighting, hoping her body would adapt and neutralize the poison but the baby orc with the dragger was climbing up between her legs, biting as she went. “Oh, no, no, no...”

She needed to get the baby off her but if she stopped shooting, the mob would overwhelm her.

Up the baby climbed, stabbing her with the poison dagger all the time until at last it reached her neck and sliced across her jugular. “Oh shit!”

Any moment now it would come. Her neck would be sliced in two and she would fall before the

orcs, a never ending feast, forever in pain. But Galla was still inside the bus. And Galla stood no chance against these things. So Lucy kept firing at the orcs.

Lucy held her ground even as she felt the dagger enter the back of her neck and start to turn. She wondered if she should ask for a mercy kill from the cowboy. No. Galla needed those extra seconds afforded by the slower death.

As her nerves were cut her legs went limp and her shots went wild. Not that it mattered with so many orcs nearby and the spirit of the Farsh-nuke in her blood to hold her up. She could almost feel his body embracing hers, his hands helping her aim the gun, his legs supporting hers, his voice whispering in her ears. “Go ask someone who’s just got engaged what’s the big deal about a ring? It’s symbolic. The collar represents the contract between owner and pet, that neither shall leave unless shit seriously hits the fan. ’Till death do us part.”

Lucy fell. She fell and turned in the air. The gun was launched into the swarm of orcs.
Her body hit the ground and the orcs surged over her body, towards the doors, towards Galla.
“Goodbye” said the spirit of the Farsh-nuke as darkness filled her vision.

“Get the HELL away from my family!” cried Galla.

A blast of energy shattered the glass in the bus door and the orcs were stunned.

Another blast came, blowing the door off its hinges and impaling some orcs.

A third blast turned the orcs standing over Lucy into raspberry jam.

Now the orcs fled or tried too.

An orc had picked up Lucy's gun and accidentally used the turn setting on some of its friends who stood like obelisks now, awaiting orders and halting the retreat with their very existence.

Lucy saw Galla standing silhouetted in the doorway of the bus and three words came from her mouth instinctively. “Orcs. Must. Die.”

The possessed orcs obeyed as they murdered their kin.

Galla had no mercy either. She blasted groups of ten orcs at a time into a fine paste.

Galla screamed. “If you make it back to your homeland! To your kin! To your families! If you make it back to tell stories of how you felled the great Lucy Badass! You tell them this! She!” Shotgun blast. “Is!” Shotgun blast. “Defended!” Shotgun Blast.

The orcs that could ran.

The orcs that couldn't cried as one. “We surrender!!!”

Galla stopped firing and helped Lucy to her feet.

The Queen of the Weresharks stopped killing but kept disarming orcs and scratching them.

The cowboy didn't quite get the memo.

“Alright! We'll talk surrender terms!” cried Galla.

The cowboy kept picking off orcs with pretty little headshots.

“Could you stop killing us then?” asked one of the orcs.

Galla said. “Calm down. The Queen of the Weresharks is merely disarming you and granting you the gift of regeneration.”

Pop!

The head of the orc Galla was talking to exploded like a water balloon.

“No, we are still killing them.” said Lucy. “Hang on, I'll tell him to stop.”

Lucy climbed on top of the bus and told the cowboy to knock it off.

“So, complete unconditional surrender?” suggested Galla “You fight for us now.”

Lucy called down. “I'm sure I have a few hamster cages they can sleep in”

“Oh and nominate a leader, he'll be the only one involved in negotiations.” said Galla.

“She.” said one of the Orcs.

“Pardon.”

“Well, we're all female.”

***

Her name was Galbion Nobnacker Skullburster. She was 37. Taller and fatter than the Queen of the Weresharks when she was in beast mode and had a very pronounced underbite. Next to her Galla felt positively svelte and anorexic.

Galbion finished explaining. “So that's how we got here.”

Lucy nodded approvingly. “Excellent. That fits with our current theory and together we really can defeat any threat that comes our way.”

There was a knock of the door of the meeting room and a three foot tall woman with giant butterfly wings on her back and a magic wand with a five pointed star on the end was flying in the air.

Lucy closed the door and went back to her chair at the meeting as she muttered. “No such thing as fairies.”

“Pardon?” asked Galbion.

Lucy barked. “There's no such thing as fairies!”

The Queen of the Weresharks tilted her head and looked carefully at Lucy. “We know, Lucy.”

“I'll get the door.” said Galla.

Galla got up from her seat, strode over to the door, opened it, saw the fairy, strode back to her chair, sat in it and said casually. “I think I have fairly conclusive evidence that they do exist.”

The fairy flew over the top of the table. “Oh dear, I am sorry, but I am rather in a pickle you see.”

Lucy glared at Galla and snapped. “Fuck off!”

The fairy blushed. “Oh dear, I am sorry, but this is rather important.”

“Fuck off and go die in a fire.” said Lucy calmly.

Galla frowned. “I really don't see what the issue is. We are inside a spaceship that is bigger on the inside, we just made peace with orcs that were trying to kill us. This guy's a walking tropefest and that woman's capable of becoming a shark and summoning the minds of dead men to possess her via blood control. What's so different about a fairy?”

Lucy stood up and stared the fairy in the eyes. “Where were you!? Where were you, hmm!? Where the fuck were you!? Where were you when my sisters were screaming? Where were you when the Farsh-nuke was slaughtering women or eating them alive?”

Lucy started walking round the table, circling the fairy. “See, this is the problem with believing in the supernatural. It does you no fucking good. Men get inspiring fantasies to give them the confidence to stand tall and fight. We get to fantasize that maybe we aren't the feeble helpless creatures in need of protection by men that we are told we are.”

Lucy spat in the face of the fairy. “I made my own god and he actually did what I wanted him to do. You did nothing.”

Lucy walked out of the room.

Galla silently followed.

The fairy looked to the cowboy. “What did I do?”

The cowboy shrugged.

Chapter 5
The Fairy War

“So...” said the cowboy. “You're a fairy?”

“Yes.” said the fairy. “My name is Flitzy Sapphire Honeytoast, I am seven hundred years old and very proficient with the fairy dust.”

The Queen of the Weresharks yawned and stretched out a clawed hand in the fairy's direction.

The cowboy kicked the Queen of the Weresharks under the table, glared at her then said. “It's very nice to meet you, Flitzy. What can we do for you?”

Flitzy said. “Me and a shower of fair folk were just playing in the fields, harvesting the crops and slaughtering the animals with joy -”

“Slaughtering with joy?” mouthed the Queen of the Weresharks excitedly.

“- when the bad fairies came. The ones with sticks and rope who do bad things to bad children. They said it was their harvest too and they needed more fairy dust to convert more bad children to bad fairies. Said they would skin one of us and pulp us to get the most fairy dust. We fought and then the women, and some of the men who used to be women, were transported here. There wasn't enough of us to fight the bad fairies so they held them off while I ran. Please, you need to get ready. The bad fairies are coming for me.” said Flitzy

The cowboy nodded. “We'll be ready and we'll help you get revenge. Queen of the Weresharks, could you please convince Lucy that we need her help?”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded and took the gun.

The cowboy glared at her.

“I won't use it, I just want to play with her.” said the Queen of the Weresharks innocently.

The cowboy rolled his eyes. “She is not your pet to play with” Then he started showing Flitzy how the memory gun worked.

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded. “Okay I see how it is.” She left the room without the gun.

***

The Queen of the Weresharks knocked on the door of Lucy's room and accidentally pushed it open, revealing a room where items of clothing had clearly been thrown haphazardly and on the centre of the bed lay a naked, oiled and purring Lucy as Galla massaged her.

The Queen of the Weresharks studied the scene, hoping to capture every tiny perfect detail to memory.

Galla stared at her. “It's not a sex thing if that's what you're thinking. The shedding of the clothes distances a sylph from their agency and so their responsibility. After meeting that fairy Lucy rather needed to forget she was a sapient creature for a while. What do you want anyway?”

The Queen of the Weresharks smiled a toothy grin. “Attack of the killer fairies. We need our wizard.”

“I am not a wizard.” said Lucy indignantly.

Galla scowled. “And now you've gone and woken her.”

Lucy rolled her eyes “Galla, dear, I appreciate your concern but the main reason we're doing this is so I will be fit for battle. Mother of the blood, kindly tell the cowboy to ready a memory gun round. I want Galbion's army geared up and ready for battle.”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded and turned to leave when Lucy added. “Oh and if I find out anyone else has gotten hold of the memory you just saw I will dissect you and make you eat

yourself in the sure and certain knowledge that you will live through the experience."

The Queen of the Weresharks smiled and left the room.

***

The cowboy watched from atop the bus as Galbion led her troops out the bus and into formation. He whistled. "Impressive, General!"

Galbion called up. "My thanks, sir! We've fought the likes of elves and men! We can match some fairies!"

"Excellent. General."

"One thing, Sir!?"

"Yes, General."

"I'm not a General, Sir."

The cowboy laughed. "You are now, General. These women will fight and die at your command. You're in charge and they need to know that"

"Aye, Sir!" said General Galbion, saluting.

"Where did you get such impeccable military skills, *Sir*?" asked Lucy, now stood behind him as she wore her battle uniform, greatcoat blowing in the wind.

The cowboy didn't turn around. He kept watching the orc soldiers go through their marching orders. "Before I realised who and what I was, before I came out, I joined the army. I was sent to Iraq. I had a great time there. I mean I think my squad mates all knew that I wasn't like other women, they tried to protect me you know, these silly urges men get sometimes. They were great people. I killed a lot of people, and I made mistakes. You get so jumpy if you're not careful. I was killed by my best friend. Right here."

The cowboy turned and pointed to where an image of a cowboy had been sewn on his waistcoat. He looked Lucy in the eyes. "Glancing blow to the ribs and a small fragment punctured my heart. Ambulance couldn't get there in time. I died in my friend's arms. I forgave him."

"So what happened after that?" asked Lucy.

The cowboy shrugged. "The Architects of Chaos intervened, they saved me at the last second and replaced me with a brainless clone. They healed me to full health and gave me the option of having the op. I said no because the shock of what had happened was enough without adding a change of genitals into the mix. And then they said they could drop me off at home or I could travel through time and space, fighting a more just war. I chose the latter."

"And the genitals?" asked Lucy. She cringed the instant after she'd asked the question.

The cowboy blinked. "Well, I suppose I haven't given it much thought, this new lifestyle is so exciting I haven't seen the need to. Plus this is how I've always been."

“Well, as long as you're happy” said Lucy then she hugged him.

At that moment the Queen of the Weresharks sniped the cowboy with a memory gun round and a vision of an oiled up Lucy filled his head. He froze as the memory sunk in.

Lucy whispered in his ear. “Don't worry, that's just the Queen of the Weresharks sniping you with a memory gun. You don't fancy me and I know you're not stupid enough to fantasize about me.”

“Right.” said the cowboy, very much aware of how easy it would be for Lucy to snap his neck.

Lucy pulled back and asked. “So where's the fairy?”

“Umm…” The cowboy looked away awkwardly.

“I don't like umm.” said Lucy warily.

“Hehe... She wanted a tour of the ship and when we got to your room she wondered why you had hamster cages, guinea pig runs, dog kennels and cages for full grown adults hidden behind a painting.”

“You didn't?”

The cowboy grimaced. “I showed her where you keep your sylph pills and she ate one.”

“Which one?”

“The-” He whistled. “-one”

Lucy's mouth dropped open in horror.

“And the best part is since I refused to touch the sylph pills, Flitzy Honeytoast has imprinted on you.”

Lucy's eyes widened. She started counting.

The cowboy ran and dove off the bus, was caught ably by the orc troopers. He found the Queen of the Weresharks and said “Head up there with the gun, now. She's all yours.”

The Queen of the Weresharks climbed on top of the bus and said. “So I hear you're finally ready to become my toy...”

Lucy turned, snatched the gun from the Queen of the Weresharks and proceeded to carry out her threat.

Galla joined the cowboy watching the demonstration. “Nice show, old man”

“Thanks, I think I did a good job.” said the cowboy as he listened to the Queen of the Weresharks beg for mercy.

Galla nodded. “Yeah we'll able to take care of a bunch of fairies, no problem.”

“For all our sakes, I hope you are correct. So I know Lucy's tragic backstory and she knows mine,

what's yours?”

“Well -” Galla was interrupted by the cackling of forty anorexic green children with sticks and rope.

“Company, attention! Fire when ready!” Barked General Galbion.

Twenty orcs proceeded to fire into the air at the fairies.

Galla and the cowboy started sniping at the fairies.

***

Lucy was just trying to figure out how to fit the Queen of the Weresharks' left foot down her human form throat when a noose suddenly dropped round her head, tightened round her neck and lifted her off the ground. She squirmed to look around and just about understood that she was being held aloft by a fairy.

***

Galla and the cowboy watched this happen and while Galla focused her efforts on downing the fairy carrying Lucy, the cowboy ran up the side of the bus to help the Queen of the Weresharks.

***

As Lucy was carried off she realised how stupid she had been. The Queen of the Weresharks was Galla's best hope of protection and Lucy had put her out of action. Stupid. Stupid. And all because Lucy wanted to have her cake and eat it. To be the strong in control leader but also the pretty team pet. The Queen of the Weresharks' voice rang loud and clear in Lucy's head:
“You are one of my children and you have the abilities of the sylph and the Logicio but the Farsh-nuke tamed you too well. You will not use the power my blood gives you. You prefer to be passive and submissive. That will get your friend killed!”

As Lucy stared down at Galla she knew it to be true. But then a voice from beyond the grave, a voice within her very blood seemed to say something to her, it said. “I know how to break a person, to crush their soul until they’re less than a shell but I never use that power because it’s wrong and it’s evil. Just this once though, I’ll make an exception. You will kill yourself.”

And Lucy knew what she had to do.

***

Five fairies dove down and carried off an orc. They proceeded to eat her alive in mid air, blood and guts showering down on the other orcs.

Galla was being ignored. The lone newbie with a peashooter who could barely aim was not a high enough priority to attack yet.

The cowboy was busy freeing the Queen of the Weresharks from the bizarre contraption Lucy had constructed to force the Queen of the Weresharks to eat her own organs when a couple of fairies landed behind him and started tying him up. He ignored the distraction and focused on freeing the Queen of the Weresharks. At last he pulled away the last restraint and in his jubilation his hands were grabbed and bound behind his back as a noose was fitted around his neck.

***

A fairy landed on Lucy's back and exposed her spine with a dirty knife. It then proceeded to blow what looked like soot inside her exposed cavity.

The shark inside Lucy stirred. “Not yet. The timing isn't right.”

***

Suddenly Galla was the most important person on the battlefield. The highest priority target. She saw the fairies heading in her direction and pulled out the syringe of blood, taking the time to affix the needle to the syringe properly and inject the blood into her veins before she started running. She only narrowly made it and knew that she couldn't run for more than a few seconds.

***

A fairy landed on the cowboy's back, exposed his spine with a dirty knife and blew what looked like soot into his cavity.

***

Now.

Now was the moment.

Now was the time to act.

So Lucille Danse walked down to the cellar of her mind and approached the cage of a great monster. She slipped an elegant, fractal key into the lock and turned it. Immediately the monster consumed her.

***

Galla stopped running and fell on her back.

Every fairy that did not have a burden to carry swarmed to feast on succulent human flesh. Those that did have a burden to carry swarmed more slowly but that was enough.

***

Lucy grew, bursting her noose open at the seams. She caught the fairy who had carried her with a great swipe of her right claws and rocketed upwards, infecting the fairy who was carrying the cowboy and freeing him in the process then she leapt towards the swarm over Galla.

***

Galla grew and swatted away the fairies, infecting them in the process then leaped to her feet and started infecting fairies on the ground.

***

As the cowboy fell, he grew and caught a safe ride to the ground on the back of a fleeing fairy that he infected. Then he picked up his gun and started taking pot shots.

***

Lucy danced on top of the fairies, infecting each of them with every bound, leap and gambol.

***

Throughout all of this General Galbion and her troops continued firing, even as their numbers were thinned and picked off any fleeing fairies.

***

The Queen of the Weresharks sat unnoticed at the centre of a circle of writing written in blood atop the bus. With an immense effort of will and focus she clapped her hands.

***

The fairies dropped to the ground, unconscious.

***

Lucy returned to human form and fell to the ground.

***

Galla returned to human form, was allowed to lower herself to the ground and dropped unconscious.

***

The cowboy carefully placed his gun on the ground, returned to human form and dropped unconscious.

***

General Galbion observed this impassively then ordered her troops to restrain the unconscious fairies and stick them in secure sylph cages.

Lucy pulled herself to her feet and observed the devastation.

The Queen of the Weresharks called over. “You can be quite helpful when you want to be!”

Lucy climbed up the bus to where the Queen of the Weresharks sat in the centre of her witches circle.

The Queen of the Weresharks said quietly. “You think I'm the muscle because I am a wereshark but I am more than that. Far, far, more. You think being a Logicio and a sylph with training under the Farsh-nuke makes you a special hero. That you are a special snowflake whose knowledge of the multiverse cannot be rivalled. You may be right, but it's a poor scientist who misses evidence and resources before their very eyes. I have tried to be playful with you, to gently prod you to obey me

but I am sick of playing games. I control the blood. You control the battlefield. You obey me."

Lucy staggered. "Galla's my owner."

The Queen of the Weresharks screamed. "Do I look like I want to keep you as my fucking pet!?"

Lucy stammered. "I-I-I-"

The Queen of the Weresharks said simply and quietly. "You are a sylph. That means you are strong and obey orders. You are also a wereshark. That means you are strong and obey orders but instead of using your power to be strong and obey orders you appeal to vanity and try to remain in human form when swarms of monsters are attacking despite the fact that it would be far more efficient for you to shark out. Galla knows this. The first thing she did when she became a wereshark was shark out to better achieve her battlefield objectives. You prefer to let me or a dozen orcs eat you."

Lucy said icily. "My best friend was a man who killed and ate innocent women everyday because it made sense to him. Forgive me if I have my own moral code to prevent me from doing that."

The Queen of the Weresharks stared into Lucy's eyes. "Then why is it that yesterday you killed more people than you did today?"

Lucy suggested. "Because you were controlling the blood? Keeping everyone alive, coordinating the attack and engineering the final knock out blow?"

"Exactly." said the Queen of the Weresharks. "I know you disapprove of mind control but if its done for a few seconds to avoid killing someone, isn't that better? Heck I made you believe what you did just now was your own idea."

Lucy exploded. "You mindraped me!?"

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded. "Or did you think those surprisingly appropriate flashbacks were your own?"

Lucy stared at her in disbelief.

"I give you my word, if I didn't care how you felt about this you'd already be my toy. So please obey me or I will have to do what's best for everyone again and make you obey me."

Lucy licked her teeth and walked away.

Lucy entered the ship and entered her room, she found the cage containing Flitzy and had the ship's automated systems let her inside.

Flitzy ran up to Lucy and licked her face.

Lucy hugged Flitzy and said. "Flitzy, darling, I fear the bad fairies got me and I might be a little bit possessed so if I start being mean or rude just paralyse me and ignore my protestations. Now please tell me the entire history of the fairies in as much detail as you can."

As Lucy looked upon Flitzy's very excited face she recalled what the Queen of the Weresharks said "Obey me, or I will make you obey me."

Chapter 6
The Fair Were Army

After five minutes Flitzy blew fairy dust into Lucy's face and Lucy screamed.

“Oh, sorry, did I hurt you?” asked Flitzy.

Lucy blinked and coughed then said. “No, Flitzy, you freed me from a great and terrifying spell.”

“Yay yay. I did a good thing.” clapped Flitzy excitedly.

“What did you do?” asked Lucy.

“I put a spell on you with my fairy dust, it cleared you of possession and warded you against it.” said Flitzy

Lucy beamed and hugged Flitzy. “I'm sorry I shouted at you. I didn't realize you were – Well I didn't realize how adorable you are. May I see your fairy dust by the way?”

Flitzy beamed. “Of course.” She held out a handful of fairy dust.

Lucy bent down on one knee to examine it, scanning it with her techno-wand. “Fascinating, this fairy dust appears to be composed of millions of tiny logic crystals. Imbue it with a particular logic program and it'll deliver the spell right to the source.”

“Like this.” said Flitzy before she blew the dust into Lucy's face. It dissolved the instant it touched her face and so no irritation was caused but Lucy's ears did grow pointy and giant butterfly wings grew from her back.

Lucy laughed and ruffled Flitzy's hair.

“Oh dear.” said Flitzy.

Lucy stared at her. “What's happened? Am I a goat now?”

“No, not a goat.” said Flitzy awkwardl “The spell I used was very safe, difficult prerequisites, nothing should have happened.”

“Right...”

“I mean it will only give you fairy powers if you are a bad fairy and you're not a bad fairy are you?”

Lucy walked over to where a full length mirror stood on a wall and observed her wings. “Yup, I'm a fairy now.”

“With bad fairy powers.” said Flitzy. “And personally I think you look rather fetching.”

Lucy looked downcast. “Please say I can hide these aspects?”

“Of course.” said Flitzy as she blew dust on Lucy.

Lucy's wings vanished and her ears returned to normal. She smiled and hugged Flitzy. “Thank you.

Now a little birdy told me you've been rather naughty and eaten one of my special pills”

Flitzy grinned. “I'm a sylph now, like you.”

Lucy chuckled. “I suppose you are. Now why don't you tell me what takes to be a fairy while I tell you what it takes to be a sylph.”

Flitzy nuzzled Lucy. “Anything for you.”

Lucy's eyes widened in terror briefly but then she patted Flitzy's back and started to explain what being a sylph meant.

***

Galla woke to find herself naked in Lucy's bed.

The Queen of the Weresharks was sitting at the foot of her bed, collar and leash held meaningfully in her hands.

Galla sighed. “I'm very flattered but I already have a pet and Lucy's quite the handful as it is.”

The Queen of the Weresharks sniggered as she looked at where Galla's breasts were hidden from view. “You took the blood. You're my toy now.”

Galla shook her head. “Oh, Queenie, do you honestly think I am afraid of you?”

A sick smile spread across the Queen of the Wereshark's face. “I made Lucy lock herself in with the fairy. I can make you commit suicide.”

“Then try me.”

The Queen of the weresharks closed her eyes and sniggered. She pulled her triple bladed sword out of her thigh holster and stabbed herself in the hearts. Her eyes widened in horror. “How?”

Galla smiled and said lightly. “I'm tougher than I look. Now, understand that I don't care about you and Lucy's stupid little squabble. I just care that Lucy remains my pet. That means you do not undermine my authority and if you kill her or invade my mind I will atomise your soul.”

The Queen of the Weresharks swallowed. “You are not the human I so nearly devoured in Woking.”

Galla showed her teeth and her eyes glowed green. “It is not your business to know who or what I am. Only to understand what I command you to understand.”

Galla got out of bed and walked past the Queen of the Weresharks with a sigh.

When Galla got to the bathroom she vomited up and stared at her reflection in the mirror above the basin. She punched the mirror and watched the glass fall to the floor.

***

The cowboy woke up.

He woke up and recalled a dream he'd had while falling.

They were in a library. It was clearly Georgian but had modern books. The Queen of the Weresharks sat opposite him. They were both sitting in comfortable armchairs.

The Queen of the Weresharks was wearing reading glasses on the end of her nose and reading off a notepad. “Now it says here that we were scheduled to have a talk but I can't seem to find your name anywhere, what is it?”

“I don't have one.” said the cowboy. “The name on my birth certificate belongs to a dead woman.”

“Okay.” The Queen of the Weresharks jotted something down. “We'll call you The Cowboy. What is it you do?”

The Cowboy shrugged. “I ride into town, find out what the trouble is and put a stop to it.”

“Good.” said the Queen of the Weresharks as she noted something down. Then she leaned back and pulled off her reading glasses so she could wipe them with a cloth. “And what do you think of me?”

The Cowboy gave a half smile. “You have a wicked sense of humour, a mean streak and a heroic streak. You can be a genius mastermind or a boisterous bruiser. It's been fun working with you.”

The Queen of the Weresharks replaced her glasses on the end of her nose. “And am I a good woman? Am I moral?”

The Cowboy took a deep breath then deflated. “Not always, no.”

The Queen of the Weresharks beamed back at him. “Excellent! Now about that penis you wanted...”

An image of Lucy, naked and oiled, overcame him. He breathed it in and cried out as a wave of ecstasy overwhelmed him.

He opened his eyes to find himself lying in his ruined clothes atop the bus. He got to his feet and cried out. “I have a penis!” His shirt fell apart and he discovered something else. “I have abs! I am ripped!”

***

Galla let Lucy out of the hamster cage and started stroking her and massaging her immediately.

Lucy melted in Galla's arms, welcoming her caress like a hot shower after a hard day's work.

When Lucy was lying naked in bed Galla admitted. “I miss my cat Uni.”

Lucy nuzzled Galla. “You've got me.”

Galla laughed and squeezed Lucy. “I know and you are amazing. My favourite person in the whole wide world.”

“But I'm not a cat.” said Lucy with a chuckle.

Galla barked. “Ha!” Then she sighed. “But seriously, Uni chose me. Uni chose me and I might

never see her again.”

Lucy nodded compassionately then crawled across Galla's lap and said. “Check this out.” Two great butterfly wings grew from Lucy's back.

Galla moaned with delight “Aww! That's awesome! They're beautiful. Can I touch them?”

Lucy nodded.

Galla gently stroked the side of Lucy's left wing. It felt like a mix between an ear and the clear plastic coating on a ready meal.

Lucy laughed. “That tickles.”

“Can you fly?” asked Galla.

Lucy nodded and flew up into the air. “It takes more effort than running but I can do it. I've even got fairy magic.”

Galla beamed and stood up on the bed to stroke Lucy's cheek. “Well then, my butterfly, why don't you put on my clothes so we can decide what to do about our fairy prisoners?”

Lucy blushed. “Actually I have a thing for that.”

***

The Queen of the Weresharks and Galbion were the first in the meeting room and chatted politely about fights.

“Now Elves, they make a good squelch when you hit them. You can really feel their insides burst.” said Galbion.

“Ah but humans, they taste the best. Have you ever tried spitroasting a baby fresh from its mother's womb?” countered the Queen of the Weresharks.

The Cowboy entered the meeting room and nodded to the Queen of the Weresharks and Galbion before he sat down.

Next Lucy and Galla entered in their usual suits. Hanging on a chain from Lucy's belt was a birdcage about the size and shape of a tennis ball. Flitzy Honeytoast was hovering inside it. When they sat down Lucy unclipped the bird cage and set it hovering atop a stand in the middle of the table so Flitzy could watch and hear all the proceedings.

Lucy stood up to begin the meeting. “Ladies and Gentleman, we are here to discuss the new potential our encounters yesterday have provided us and may I say, cowboy, that suit you are wearing today is particularly dashing.”

The Cowboy smiled and blushed as he stood up. “Why thank you, Maam. You and Galla are both looking particularly stunning yourselves but I'm afraid I'm not staying in this party. I have a higher destiny now. The Queen of the Weresharks and I made a deal and as part of that deal I need to go. I am reliably informed that my ride will be somewhere in London so I have a long way to go and I can't afford to be slowed down. I will tell the Architects of Chaos where you are though, see if I

can't send some help.”

Lucy smiled at the Cowboy, which made him blush further.

He sat down.

Galla stood up. “Ladies and Gentleman, back before we met many of you. Lucy and the Queen of the Weresharks nominated me the leader of this party. Mainly because we were walking though my hometown-”

Lucy and the Queen of the Weresharks chuckled. The Cowboy smiled. Flitzy squealed.

Galla paused for the laughter to die down then continued. “Now though, it seems oddly appropriate. General Galbion, leader of the orc infantry. Her Royal Highness the Queen of the Weresharks, mother of the blood. And Sister Lucille badass of the SLF Leader of the fairy air corps. You all have key strategic positions and skills. Except for me and so I am free to be in charge. Now I know we are sharing our skill sets. For example, the orc infantry will become weresharks and the fairies will similarly be able to infect. But managing the battlefield works best when you only have to work on the tasks you are assigned. Galbion, you are infantry. A massed group of gunners ready to blast apart any threat on the land. Lucy, you are air corps. Your job is to neutralise any flight based threat by infecting or killing them. Mother of the Blood, we need you on the ground, ready to shut down any infected.”

“And you?” asked the Cowboy.

“I give the orders.” said Galla confidently. “You don't have to listen to me but any second you spend questioning my orders is a second you spend not neutralizing the enemy.”

The Cowboy nodded. “Fair enough.”

The Queen of the Weresharks held up a finger and spoke when Galla nodded her consent. “What about me? Yesterday we were lucky, they didn't think I was capable of thinking. What happens next time I'm in the blood and someone tries to kill me?”

Galla answered. “The kitchen here is capable of vat growing meat in seconds. With a bit of work it can be reengineered to grow a mindless but living clone of Lucy with all her abilities. I already have the computer synthesising one now. We think we can rig the clones up to a kind of telepathic control so Flitzy here can operate the clone and stand guard when you meditate.”

“And I could have my own toy Lucy.” said the Queen of the Weresharks with a grin.

Lucy shuddered.

Galla smiled at the Queen of the Weresharks. “I've patented the programme to create the mindless clone so I retain all copyright of the technology and its products. So remember I will be watching to make sure you don't get carried away.”

The Queen of the Weresharks grimaced.

“Or if you prefer we could just leave you to die.” said Galla cheerily. “Now, Galbion, can you and some of you women help Flitzy here turn our prisoners of war into good fairies? Cowboy, I believe Lucy wants a private word with you in her room.”

Galbion left, taking Flitzy with her.

Then the Cowboy and Lucy left.

The Queen of the Weresharks swallowed. Galla was between her and the door.

Galla walked calmly over to the Queen of the Weresharks, her eyes glowing green then she put her hand on the Queen of the Weresharks' shoulder.

Suddenly they were in a library and sitting in armchairs. The Queen of the Weresharks was wearing reading glasses and there was a notebook in her lap.

Galla pulled a strap-on from a pocket. “Mother of the Blood, let me show you what mindrape feels like so you will understand why I refuse to let you have your way with Lucy.”

***

“So?” asked the Cowboy when they were in Lucy's bedroom.

“I was your first ejaculation wasn't I?” asked Lucy playfully as she stroked the cowboy's abs.

The Cowboy's mouth dropped open in astonishment. “How did you-?” Then he laughed as he guessed how Lucy knew.

“I like you.” said Lucy, as she slid her right hand down his trousers.

He squealed and pulled her close. “I like you too but I thought you were – Well you and Galla? I am also about to go.”

Lucy looked up into his eyes. “Galla's my best friend and my owner but she's not my lover and besides you can call it a christening present. I mean you are just so hot.”

She lightly squeezed with her right hand. His voice went high pitched. “Oh-Kay! We are really going to do this then?”

She grinned as she undid his trousers with her left hand. “Let's have sex.”

***

Two orcs held an emaciated child before Galbion. Galbion held the small birdcage before the child's face. Flitzy blew fairy dust at the face of the child and his green and black skin turned a healthy brown as butterfly wings grew on his back and his ears grew pointed. An orc in a dinner jacket hugged the lad when he was released and said. “There's some food and drink in that room over there, eat as much as you need to.”

“Thank you, Sir” said the boy as he ran off.

“Next!” ordered Galbion as another bad fairy was brought forward for cleansing.

***

Galla left the meeting room.

The Queen of the Weresharks was staring into space, horror in her eyes, her hands shook as she raised them to rake her face.

“I'm a monster.” She breathed.

***

Lucy and the Cowboy lay back in bed breathing heavily.

“Sorry, I was so quick” said the cowboy as he rolled up a joint.

“Eh, it's okay.” said Lucy gently. “As a sylph I get empathic orgasms that are twice as strong as normal if my partner finishes before me and crucially this way I get to have another orgasm after you've gone, hehe.”

The Cowboy finished rolling up the spliff, lit it and took a drag. “Well, I'm sorry anyway. Still, can't be a grand master on your first day.”

“No.” said Lucy sweetly. “That is true.” Then she reached under the covers and pulled out an egg.

The Cowboy looked at the egg worriedly. “The condom did hold didn't it?”

“Oh hell yeah, it did! Logicio condoms aren't just plastic. They're specially programmed infinite bags designed to look and feel like condoms by an actual warping of reality. Ain't no way they're bursting unless you want to have sex with a black hole.” said Lucy gleefully.

The Cowboy asked. “Then why the egg?”

“So you'll remember me.” said Lucy “She'll grow up to be an exact clone of me in about 6 months. Even have my memories. If you get sick of her drop her off at the homeworld of the Architects of Chaos.”

“Err...” said the Cowboy, trying to think about the logistics of hatching an egg and raising a sylph while heading to London through the deserted western half of the Roman empire.

“Fine, I'll pack it and an egg of Flitzy in a special container with everything you need to look after them and know how to.” said Lucy as she left the bed to follow through on what she just said.

The Cowboy couldn't think of anything to say so he just took a nice long toke of his spliff.

***

After an hour the Cowboy was ready to depart.

Lucy and Galla each shook his hand and hugged him. Lucy whispered. “She'll let herself out of the backpack when she's mature enough.”

The Cowboy grimaced. “Thank you.”

The Queen of the Weresharks handed him a plush leather box. “I got you this. I hope you don't

mind.”

The Cowboy smiled and thanked her.

General Galbion saluted. “Good luck, Sir! I hope to become an Architect of Chaos myself someday.”

The Cowboy saluted back. “I'll buy you a drink at your graduation, Galbion.”

The Cowboy addressed them all. “Thank you my friends. It’s almost a running joke that I've met each one of you while trying to kill you but you have made me a better person and a better man. Though I am going now. I do hope to see you all in Rome when my rescue mission arrives there. Good luck with your journey.”

Then the Cowboy wandered off into the sunset.

Lucy started crying and Galla comforted her.

The Queen of the Weresharks grinned like a Cheshire cat.

General Galbion went back to work healing the bad fairies.

***

When the Cowboy could no longer see the party he'd left behind, he opened the box the Queen of the Weresharks gave him. Inside was a dog collar in his size with “The Cowboy” engraved on the name tag. He laughed at this and then read a note that was also inside the box. It said the following:

Dear Cowboy,
Thank you for becoming my champion.
I mean that honestly and sincerely.
Thank you.
Your first mission is to find out what a young woman called Galla is doing in ancient Rome and why when her eyes glow green she has a force of will and control of reality stronger than any Elder God.
This mission is of most importance so you are to take the enclosed sylph pill and start running. An Elder God by the name of Gfaxxy Quluwmcy will find you and rescue you. You will become her pet and be taken to the home world of the Architects of Chaos. There you can hand her this note and after submitting to a few tests should be able to follow through with your mission.
Yours Sincerely,
The Queen of the Weresharks

The cowboy carefully folded the note back up and put it back in the box. He removed the sylph pill the carefully shut and stowed the box. He swallowed the pill and started running.

Chapter 7
Ride Of The Valkyries

General Galbion was on watch atop the bus when she saw specks swooping and blowing horns off in the distance. She climbed down and entered the driver's seat. She started the bus turned around in a wide lazy arc then put the pedal to the metal and started humming a tune: Ba-ba-ba-ba-Ba, Ba-ba-ba-ba-Ba, Ba-Ba-Ba-Ba!

***

Inside the spaceship Galla and Lucy were woken by the floor shaking, the lights fickering red and a great bonging droning on and on.

“The fuck is that!?” screamed Galla.

“Trouble!” cried Lucy, already out of bed and getting dressed.

Galla stumbled over the wall mounted PA system and screamed into the microphone. “All units this is Galla. We are under attack! I repeat we are under attack! Fairy corps I want you patrolling the skies now! Infantry I want you armed and ready to fight the moment we stop! Mother of the Blood, I need you in position to control the battlefield!”

Lucy jerked to attention and growled emotionlessly. “The clones aren't ready yet!”

Galla screamed over the Intercom. “And possessing my friend makes me real sad about that! Now move!”

Lucy almost collapsed when the Queen of the Weresharks stopped possessing her but continued to gear up.

Galla started getting dressed.

***

Galbion could see the Valkyries gaining on the bus in the rear view mirror and muttered. “Come on, come on.”

Lucy ran out of the ship and jumped out the open door.

For a heart stopping moment Galbion thought Lucy was dead but then she watched Lucy soar sky high behind her.

40 fairies flew out of the ship then out the bus and into the sky, each armed with a pistol.

Then the orcs started filing out and taking defensive positions at the doors.

Galla exited the ship and approached Galbion. “Time to stop, General, but thanks for buying us time.”

General Galbion nodded and applied the brakes.

When they reached a fullstop General Galbion led the infantry up onto the battlefield.

Galla talked through a bluetooth headset. “How much longer before you're able to start controlling the battlefield, Mother of the Blood?”

“Five minutes.” said the Queen of the Weresharks.

Galla nodded and switched channels. “Lucy, talk to me.”

***

Lucy was flying in the air above the bus and staying 50 metres away from the action. “Galla, there's fricking hundreds of them. We don't stand a chance.”

Galla frowned. “Lucy darling I love you dearly but we've been outnumbered before. Get infecting people.”

“They have swords and breath weapons!”

“You're a wereshark, worst comes to the worst you just throw your heart out of combat.”

Lucy stared at the battle that was going on and sighed. “They have hostages.”

“Then rescue them.”

Lucy stared incredulously then shrugged and dove into combat. She bobbed and weaved through the melee, looking for a hostage when someone jumped onto her back and pulled a chain between her teeth.

“Dive, birdie, dive!” said the stranger.

Lucy shrugged and dove.

A Valkyrie dove down, following her.

The stranger whispered. “Blow fairy dust on to the chain.”

Lucy obeyed and the chain was whipped out of her mouth, ready for the stranger to do something that ended in a big boom.

The chain was whipped back between Lucy's teeth and Lucy flew harder.

“There's a good girl.” said the stranger.

Lucy wanted to ask so many things but she had the bit between her teeth. When they were level with the bus, the stranger hopped off. Lucy was about to fly back into the fray when the stranger scratched her behind the ear and whispered. “Follow me birdie, I'm going to have a job for you.”

So Lucy followed the stranger with the badass long coat inside the bus. They found Galla there and Lucy watched in horror as Galla so obviously melted in the stranger's arms.

“This your steed?” asked the stranger.

“She's my pet, yes.” said Galla.

“Couldn't help noting you are a little under-gunned.” said the stranger. “I think I can help even the score.”

Galla smiled. “I'm sure you could.” With a flick of the Quantum Oscillator the stranger's hands were unchained.

The stranger turned to Lucy at last. She was 7 feet tall, dark skinned, muscly, lithe and had short cropped hair. She extended a hand. “I don't think we've been properly introduced. I am Nadine Kikelomo, otherwise known as The Hooded Justice.”

Lucy shook Nadine's hand. “I am Sister Lucille Badass of the Sylph Liberation Front. I am a wereshark, a sylph, a fairy and just a little bit Farsh-nuke.”

“Otherwise known as Butterfly.” said Galla proudly.

“Well, Butterfly, let's dance!” said Nadine.

Galla clipped a leash onto the back of Lucy's collar. “Instead of reins”

Nadine smiled and nodded, using the handhold like a stirrup as she clung onto Lucy.

Lucy flew them out of the bus, hoping to accidentally bump Nadine's head on the way out. She failed.

They flew up into the air and Nadine pulled a grappling gun from out of her suit. “Going up!”

Whoosh!

Thunk!

“Argh!”

Click!

Whoosh!

Nadine dived from Lucy onto the back of one of the Valkyries. “Locate the Queen and the President!”

Lucy nodded and flew off.

She darted through the myriad air battles going on around her and spotted a short grey haired woman wearing pastel colours chained to a Valkyrie.

Lucy swooped towards them when a Valkyrie grabbed her with its claws, Lucy sharked out and infected it as she fell from its grasp. Then she climbed through the battle by jumping to catch and infect new Valkyrie handholds. At last she reached the top of the battle and ran from Valkyrie to Valkyrie, infecting as she went. She saw the Queen again and performed a somersault in mid air, transforming into fairy form as she went and she zoomed towards the Valkyrie.

Fwoosh!

A fireball burned Lucy's wings to dust and she fell.

Whoosh!

Thunk!

Click!

Whoosh!

Lucy was grabbed by the Hooded Justice who commanded. “Butterfly, shark out!”

Lucy grew into the wereshark form and grabbed hold of the Valkyrie carrying the Queen and infected it.

The Hooded Justice freed the Queen and commanded. “Butterfly, take her down!”

The Queen rode Lucy like an experienced equestrian.

The flight down was less eventful now the Queen of the Weresharks had some pawns to manipulate.

The flight back up was even easier going but then came the hard part, finding the President.

The Hooded Justice was at her side. “The President is over there, good luck!

Lucy beat her wings and darted through the battle once more. She was nearly at the President when an arrow caught her through all three hearts.

The Leader of the Valkyries reeled Lucy in and asked. “Why are you fighting us?”

Lucy laughed. “You chased us! You started picking us off!”

The Leader of the Valkyries stared at her. “We are Valkyries, this is what we do. We ferry the dead to Valhalla.”

“None of us are dead.” said Lucy pointedly.

“Is this not the Astral Plane?” asked the Leader of the Valkyries incredulously.

Lucy stared at her and said dryly. “Oh yeah, our bus crashed and we woke up in 420 ad. Of course it's not the Astral Plane, you dolts.”

“Shit!”

Lucy nodded, pulled herself off the arrow and fell.

As she fell she sharked out and climbed up through the battle to rescue the President.

Just as she was about to reach the President's carrier, the Hooded Justice knocked her onto a different Valkyrie.

The Hooded Justice asked. “What did the leader say to you?”

Lucy shrugged. “That they're Valkyries and this is what they do. Convince them they're wrong and we can end this before further bloodshed.”

The Hooded Justice nodded and dove from the Valkyrie.

Lucy sighed and threw herself off the Valkyrie. She somersaulted and changed into a fairy then flew towards the carrier, she reached out a clawed arm and infected it then turned to chase after the Hooded Justice.

The Queen of the Weresharks thought to her. “I see what you're doing and I will assist you but are you sure it's worth the risk.”

Lucy muttered. “Galla wants her, that's enough for me.”

***

The Hooded Justice hung upside down before the Leader of the Valkyries. “You have been murdering my people! What reason do you have to stop me killing you?”

“You came after us and you kidnapped us.” said the Hooded Justice.

“We are Valkyries. We carry the souls of the dead to the afterlife.” said the Leader of the Valkyries.

“But we're not dead!”

“And so my sisters are!” snapped the Leader of the Valkyries.

“I'm sorry about that! I really am! That's why I've come to offer you a truce!”

The Leader of the Valkyries snapped. “We have you outnumbered! You are at our mercy!”

The Hooded Justice tutted. “You don't say that, not if you're one of the good guys.”

The leader of the Valkyries glared at the Hooded Justice. “You are the murderers, not us.”

“Then go! Go and you may live.”

The Leader of the Valkyries gave a hollow laugh. “We do not fear you.”

“You should.”

“Oh really and why is that?”

The Hooded Justice smiled “I am the dog that barks in the night. I am the woman on the bridge that won't let you pass. I am the woman who knocks on the door at the end of the universe. Any time you mislay your pen. Any time you lose a sock. Any time you can't find your keys or wonder what it is you forgot. I am the wind that carries away your last words, the X that marks the spot, the shadow dogging your travels.”

The Hooded Justice, Lucy and every Wereshark and infected Valkyrie said as one. “I! Am! Legion!”

The Hooded Justice said. “You have five minutes, Captain. five minutes in which to obey us. If you start attacking us, we will murder you and spare you no mercy.”

The Hooded Justice wriggled free of the arrow and dropped -

- onto the waiting Lucy who flew her down toward the ground.

At the ground the Hooded Justice got off and Lucy followed her into the bus.

Galla kissed the Hooded Justice on the cheek and hugged Lucy. “Thank you, both of you.”

The Hooded Justice laughed. “Steady on, they haven't decided if they want to end the fight yet.”

Lucy laughed. “Yeah, about that? The Queen of the Weresharks basically has everyone infected. She only showed just under half because that way the Captain won't be tempted to have a pointless last stand.”

Galla clapped. “Right, Lucy, shower, I want you in your most glamorous clothes. Mrs Kikelomo, would you care to stay for drinks? Perhaps a nice candle lit dinner?”

The Hooded Justice nodded. “It would be my honour to make the acquaintance of such a beautiful lady with such a fine taste in pets.”

General Galbion entered. “They're leaving. All of the Valkyries.”

Chapter 8
The Hooded Justice

Nadine entered the dining hall of the ship to find Galla dressed in the most gorgeous dress that showed off just enough of her figure to be tasteful, refined and flattering. Lucy sat at the end of the table wearing a green sequinned dress. Nadine was wearing a tuxedo and took a seat opposite Galla. The dining hall could have been mistaken for Georgian if not for the LED candles and touch screen place mats where food could be ordered.

“Hi.” said Galla with a wave.

Nadine smiled back at Galla. “Hello.”

Galla laughed then smiled.

Lucy clapped her hands. “So...”

Nadine nodded at Lucy. “It's a nice place this?”

“Yes.” said Galla. “It's a recreation of a Georgian banquet. I mean the food is produced in seconds so it's put on a timer, allowing us to talk.”

“Oh, that's cool” said Nadine enthusiastically.

“Isn't it just?” said Galla enthusiastically.

“Yes and all we have to do to start the timer is order drinks” said Lucy cheerfully.

Nadine nodded. “Right, yes, drinks. Shall we have some wine?”

“I don't see why not?” said Galla

They both scanned the wine list on their place mats then looked up to suggest as one. “The 1987 Cabernet Sauvignon Blanc?”

They looked at each other and smiled.

Lucy clapped her hands. “Perfect!”

They laughed and ordered the wine.

Lucy asked. “So? Hooded Justice, eh?”

Nadine nodded, she smiled and leaned back. “Wondered when this question would crop up. I'm sort of a superhero.”

Galla's jaw dropped and she stared off into Nadine's blue eyes.

Lucy said. “Yes, I saw your heroics today. Clearly wasn't the first time you've given an improvised speech to intimidate someone.”

Nadine chuckled. “No. No, you're right. It wasn't.”

“How did it happen?” asked Galla dreamily.

Nadine beamed. “Oh this is my favourite part. See I wanted to be a ninja because they're cool so I did all this training and looked into eastern religions, hoping to learn the great enlightenment, the key to being a badass.”

“And?” asked Galla

“And I entered a ninja tournament.” Nadine snorted. “Sorry, it's just I was so naïve back then. I genuinely entered this ninja tournament and I progressed really far but then I realised that ninjas are basically short guys. I mean ninjas are sneaky so you want the most power occupying the smallest amount of space. And there's me, seven foot tall and eating the occasional bargain bucket and I can be fleet of foot and carve a path through attackers but I can't hide for toffee. Like you literally have to have a seven foot person sized space for me to hide and those are always the first spaces that get checked.”

Galla and Nadine laughed.

The glasses and wine materialised.

Nadine poured it.

“That ninja tournament did get me exposure though and this one guy representing a small technology firm approached me. He said I had potential and I just needed the right tools for the job, that he could provide them. His team had developed a kind of prototype invisibility cloth. It wasn't perfect yet but it might let someone hide in plain sight if they were careful. He wanted me as a guinea pig.” said Nadine as she poured.

“And you went through with it?” said Galla before sipping her wine.

Nadine shrugged. “I just needed an edge”

“Nah.” said Lucy. “I don't buy it. There must have been more than that.”

Nadine nodded. “Smart girl, your Lucy.” She explained. “I changed how espionage and hits were performed. At first my very existence gave whoever I hired an edge and that caused whoever the opposition was to fight harder and dirtier. After a few years a villain emerged. They wanted to use the powers I exhibited to cast doubt on capitalism and the rule of law. All those politicians in their glass houses telling the world what to think. So this villain started a campaign of terror, blaming me as the great blight to be wiped out.”

“And then one day the forces of good and neutrality contacted you and called you their messiah. They gave you tools by which you might fight and wipe out the enemy or at the very least become a symbol of hope.” suggested Lucy.

“How right you are.” said Nadine wi8th a smile. “Now are we ready to order?”

“I will have the half roast chicken and sticky ribs please.” said Lucy.

“I'll have the tagliatelle.” said Galla.

“And I'll have the steak.” said Nadine asd she studied her touch screen placemat. “Perfect! It’s ordered. What about you, Galla? You got a crime fighting past I ought to know about.”

Galla stared at her glass of wine. “There was a man.” Then she downed her glass of wine.

Lucy froze. She knew there had to be something special and dark about Galla for her to have been taken and she also knew that explaining it would probably be traumatic for Galla so she had distracted Galla from the question of why she was here. As Galla's best friend, as Galla's pet, Lucy knew she should distract Galla from the topic of her past. This was supposed to be where Galla seduced the Hooded Justice. Yet Lucy said nothing and listened.

Nadine topped up Galla's wine. “What sort of man?”

Galla sighed. “Sixty odd. Private. Grey hair. Professional. Respected.”

Galla locked eyes with Nadine. “He didn't rape me.”

Then Galla stared at her wine glass again. “Didn't have to rape me.”

Nadine reached across the table and held Galla's left hand compassionately.

Galla said coldly. “There are a million different ways to terrorize a woman besides rape. He didn't need to molest me to make me feel broken and worthless. He duct taped me to a chair and he hurt me. He hurt me with words and lies and mirrors. He made me believe I was a waste of space. A stink of human refuse. And then he started to cut me and beat me. He always knew how to do it such that I would heal. Didn't want to ruin my decorative value.”

The food materialized.

“And then when I broke free I tortured him and I killed him. Nobody ever knew. He'd faked his death before he kidnapped me so nobody bothered looking for him and when they did find his body there wasn't a shred of evidence to lead people to suspect it was him.” said Galla before she downed

her wine and started to eat.

Lucy followed suit and started eating.

Nadine stared at Galla for a long moment then started eating her food too.

They ate in silence.

When they finished, Galla said “Now I bet you're wondering why I brought Lucy along to this?”

Nadine raised an eyebrow. “The thought had occurred to me.”

Galla reached out a hand toward Lucy.

Lucy dragged her chair over to sit beside Galla.

“I like you.” said Galla as she studied Nadine.

Nadine blushed. “Thank you, I like you too.”

Galla blushed. “I like you but I need you to understand that I have made a commitment to Lucy. She is a sylph and needs someone she can trust to look after her, just as a dog or a cat does. I need you to like each other.”

Lucy mouthed. “Sorry.”

Nadine laughed “I have never encountered sylphs before. I thought they were spirits of the air. But I have been in open polyamorous relationships in the past and encountered more than one prospective partner who came with some form of non negotiable baggage be it a kid or a cat or a dickish best friend. I think I can adapt. Shall we have dessert?”

Lucy grinned. “I love a sorbet.”

“I think I'll have a sundae.” said Galla. “Why don't you have a coffee?”

Nadine looked oddly at Galla but then she saw how Galla's eyes were looking to the far right, where Lucy sat and that her left hand was stroking the air strangely. She got the hint. “Yes, I think I will have a coffee but first I'll use the rest room, be back in a tick.”

Lucy sighed. “So your new lover's a superhero, huh?”

Galla grinned.

Nadine returned from the toilets to find dessert had already arrived and her coffee had mysteriously materialised beside Lucy. Nadine took her seat and started sipping her coffee. “So...”

Galla said. “Well, that quite was a stroke of luck us finding you, wasn't it?”

“Yes.” said Nadine. “I don't know where I'd be without you.”

Galla brushed the hair away from her ear. “Then let us be thankful you made it here all right.”

Nadine nodded and started stroking Lucy behind the ear.

Lucy groaned with delight. “I know what you're doing and I appreciate it but I am trying to eat my sorbet.”

***

Lucy woke up naked on the dining room table. The residue of what she hoped were spilt drinks hung over her and made her sticky. Her arms and legs felt like lead.

She tried to move her head to look at her surroundings and caught a glimpse in the corner of her eyes. She turned her head all the way to the right and found a hand written note. Lucy sat up and read it:

Dear Lucy,
We owe you a lemon sorbet.
Sorry we got carried away last night.
We hope you forgot everything after desert was ordered but since you insisted on knowing what happened here is a memory gun recording compiled from all of our memories.

Sorry about everything.
Love from your owners,
Nadine and Galla

Lucy read the note carefully and kept the memory gun round. Then she had a shower and got dressed. She fired the round into her skull as Nadine and Galla exited the guest bedroom.

They saw her faint and caught her.

“Hey, Butterfly, are you okay?” asked Nadine.

“I knew we shouldn't have had desert.” said Galla.

Lucy stared into the faces of her owners and blinked. “I'm not saying I didn't enjoy it but some things just aren't appropriate. Nadine, could I have a word?”

“Of course” said Nadine.

Lucy and Nadine walked out of earshot.

Lucy squeed. “First off, wow. You are such a great catch for Galla and if I didn't know better I'd say you tamed more sylphs than the Farsh-nuke but-”

“But you didn't know about the man either?” said Nadine in a whisper.

Lucy nodded.

“And you want me to be careful because something strange is going on with Galla that has to do with whatever's drawing us all here?”

Lucy nodded. “How did you know?”

“I talked to her. I have more than enough stories to trigger some kind of 'Oh that reminds me of-' reaction. But then I guess for all you are her best friend, it's not in your nature to probe for information.” said Nadine.

Lucy nodded.

Chapter 9
The Two Lucys

After a hard day's uneventful drive the bus stopped for the night so everybody could get some food and sleep. As they were winding down for the night, the door to the ship rocked from a knocking.

An authoritative voice boomed. “Open up or we will break down this door.”

Galla and Nadine were in the kitchen sharing a romantic dinner while Lucy was blissed out on the floor after five sorbets.

Galla chilled upon hearing the voice.

“Look after Lucy.” said Nadine quietly before she wiping her face, got up and went to answer the door.

In the doorway stood a large Great White Shark with metal arms and legs, wearing a trench coat.

Nadine said simply. “I just need to press one button to seal this room and have this ship rematerialise somewhere else where upon 40 orcs and 40 fairies and the Queen of the Weresharks herself will be woken to tear you limb from limb.”

The Great White Shark sniffed Nadine then said. “No fear. You're a good liar.”

A blonde woman in leather combat gear pushed aside the cyborg shark. “Let me try, Greta.”

The woman extended a hand. “Pleased to meet you, I am First Officer Lucille Danse of the UCMS Paragon and this is Greta of the Charicthy. She's my best friend and sort of my bodyguard, can we come in?”

“Yes.” said Nadine carefully. “I think you should but remember, one button.”

The First Officer nodded and Nadine led them into the dining hall.

Galla stared at the First Officer. “Lucy?”

“Yes, how do you know my name?” said the First Officer.

Lucy kicked in her sleep and nuzzled the floor.

The First Officer and Greta tensed, hands on their blasters.

Galla tensed.

“Easy.” said Nadine. “These two are both weresharks and your doppleganger on the floor? She can fly. If you hurt either one of them the other will not stop. Incidentally if you hurt Galla you better

pray you kill me fast.”

The First Officer asked icily. “Why do you have a clone of me on the floor over there?”

“The same reason you're here.” said Galla with a shrug. “The same reason everyone's here. We were brought here.”

“Think about it.” said Nadine. “People have been drawn here from all over the multiverse, did you really think there would be no dopplegangers?”

“I want to speak to her.” said the First Officer.

Galla got up from her seat, strode up to the First Officer and whispered in her ear. “I swore an oath to keep Lucy as my pet. To care for her and to love her. You are outnumbered. Do not push me.”

Galla kissed the First Officer on the cheek then backed away to hold Nadine's hand. “There's a double bed in the console room and a shark pool on deck 3.”

“You have a shark pool?” asked Greta.

“It's a Logicio ship.” said Galla.

Greta nodded. “See you in the morning.”

Galla and Nadine watched as the First Officer and Greta left.

In the dull stillness that followed Nadine snogged Galla then she said. “Go take Lucy and lock her safely in your room. I have security arrangements to make.”

***

Lucy woke up in the hamster cage to find Flitzy hovering over her. Lucy was naked again. She groaned. “What happened last night? Oh right the sorbets and the – Oh yeah.”

Flitzy tossed Lucy an emerald green bikini. “I have been instructed that you are to wear this beneath your suit and be on your best behaviour.”

Lucy sighed. “Well I suppose it would make a difference from ending the night naked.” She got dressed. “But what's so important about today?”

Flitzy shrugged. “I can only guess that they want the option to keep you under.”

“Under?” asked Lucy.

“Yes.” said Flitzy. “You know, when you are so blissed out by all the attention that you cease to remember and think properly. Under is when Sister Lucille Badass becomes Butterfly the cat.”

Lucy made a face like she'd smelled a particularly bad fart. “I'm not a cat when I'm under am I? I always saw myself as more of a dog. Loyal, intelligent and obedient. Not psychopathic, selfish and easily distracted.”

Flitzy flew over to stroke Lucy as she tied her tie. “Dog or cat, I'm sure you're lovely. The main

thing is they want the butterfly, not the woman."

Lucy sniffed. "Well they can get both and like it."

***

The First Officer pulled out the double bed from its cubby in the wall and laid down it. She closed her eyes for a second and felt no different. Except now an orc, a fairy and Nadine were standing over her.

"Nice thing about that bed." said Nadine. "It confers what seems like a perfect night's rest to a person without any effort on their part and wakes them up exactly 8 hours after they slept, giving me time to amass reinforcements and see that you are watched."

Nadine leaned over and clipped a plastic necklace round the First Officer's neck. "That necklace is more durable than reality, let alone you. It will let us trace you across all the multiverse."

The First Officer smiled. "One of me is your pet, the other me is your prisoner."

"Oh, don't be sad." said Nadine. "You're about to get what you asked for last night."

The First Officer got up from the bed and said. "Take me to your Lucy."

***

Greta found deck 3 and the entrance to the shark pool easily enough. She guessed a vast pool with sharks didn't really need much security. She paused at the water's edge though, she needed to store her cyborg attachments somewhere.

The Queen of the Weresharks was standing beside her now. "Care for a dip?"

"I'd love to, really, but I can't." said Greta as she gestured to her servos.

"Yes, I can see your dilemma." said the Queen of the Weresharks. "But I have a solution."

The Queen of the Weresharks handed Greta a memory gun. "This ship has impressive hologram capabilities but dear Lucy refuses to let herself or anyone else use them. Probably seen too much Star Trek. Still I have been monitoring her while she sleeps and fights, backing up her memories should something happen to her, they make fascinating reading."

"And your point is?" asked Greta.

"Whatever you need, I can provide. You just need to let me know what it is and what it does, I can do the rest. Show me." said the Queen of the Weresharks.

Greta placed the handle of the memory gun between her lips and bit down very gently then pressed record. She thought about everything that might give the Queen of the Weresharks a clue as to how it works and stopped recording then she fired the round into the Queen of the Wereshark's head.

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded, pulled a quantum oscillator out of a pocket and zapped a console.

Greta smiled as a hologram of her humanoid limb tech assembler appeared at the water's edge. Greta walked into it and swam out into the pool.

The Queen of the Weresharks undressed then dove into the pool and took on shark form.

They swam lazily together for 8 hours then surfaced and got dressed in time to be met by an armed fairy and orc escort led by General Galbion, “Maams, your presence is requested at the meeting hall. I have orders to torture and kill both of you if either of you tries to resist.”

The Queen of the Weresharks laughed. “We can take you on!”

Greta smacked the back of the Queen of the Wereshark's head. “Let me guess, since the only other two people at this meeting are sylphs most of your forces will be here to escort us. Even blood control can't save you from a hundred blasts of phaser fire. We'll come quietly.”

The Queen of the Weresharks sighed sadly. “And I wanted to see the look on Galla's face when I moved my soul into Lucy and ripped her throat out. Oh well I guess there's always next time.”

Greta shook her head in disbelief as there were escorted to the meeting room.

***

Galla let Lucy out of the hamster cage and asked. “Are you wearing it?”

“Yes.” said Lucy as she stared at Galla.

“Good.” said Galla sweetlyas she checked out how Lucy was dressed. “I just didn't want you to embarrass yourself if I have to make you go under.”

“Okay.” said Lucy suspiciously.

Lucy was wearing a three piece suit, cowboy boots and a double breasted long coat.

“Right, yes, you're decent. Let's go” said Galla nervously.

Lucy rolled her eyes and followed.

As they approached the meeting room Lucy noticed a curious lack of activity and then a steadily building nervous excitement. Galla lead her through the mob of heavily armed fairies and orcs until at last Lucy was presented with a chair. She sat in it and stared into her reflection. Only for some reason Lucy's reflection was wearing a leather combat suit and a fancy looking necklace. The reflection was also missing the scars and blemishes Lucy had. She was fatter and shorter but not by much. Beside Lucy's reflection sat a cyborg shark. Lucy checked and saw that Galla was sat next to her. She could see that all the orcs and fairies were aiming at Lucy's reflection and the shark beside her.

“What is this?” asked Lucy

“Oh, you don't know?” asked Lucy's reflection.

Nadine stood up from her position at the end of the table. “I'm sorry, Sister Lucille of the Sylph Liberation Front, this is First Officer Lucille Danse of the UCMS Paragon and her best friend come

bodyguard, Greta. This whole thing is so Greta and Galla don't get all of us killed with their protective instincts. I will only interfere where I feel it pertinent to matters of security.”

Lucy nodded and watched her reflection do the same.

“Okay, I'm going to say one word, tell me if it makes you think of anything.” said Lucy carefully. “Farsh-nuke.”

Lucy's reflection nodded and laughed. “Of course he'd have something to do with this. Mine was the Great Farsh-nuke, he let me have sex with him turned me into a sylph then revealed he'd been manipulating my entire life to make me his heir, then he died.”

Lucy nodded sadly. “Sounds like the Farsh-nuke. Unfortunately my Farsh-nuke was just a pawn of the Logicios, my whole world turned to cannibalism and slavery for twenty years, just to draw him out and I was the final piece of the puzzle. The girl to warm his heart and bring out his conscience.”

Lucy's reflection frowned then asked. “May I whistle?”

“May I?” returned Lucy curiously.

Lucy's reflection nodded, Lucy nodded back.

The Lucy's whistled then each reached down into their pants to pull out an egg each. They swapped the eggs and said. “Thank you.”

“So why did you come here?” asked Lucy.

Lucy's reflection shrugged. “We were on a mission when we appeared in Rome so we walked to the edge of the empire to see what's beyond. What about you? Are you the Farsh-nuke's heir?”

Lucy laughed. “No. No, my Farsh-nuke is still alive but he thinks I'm dead and it's better this way. I'm something of a wandering traveller. Kind of looking for a new life to be honest. Thankfully Galla here has given me a loving home. I'm not just a sylph, I'm a wereshark and a fairy.”

“Ha.” said Lucy's reflection. “And my Farsh-nuke thought being a sylph made me special.”

“Do you have an owner?” asked Lucy.

Lucy's reflection nodded. “An Elder Goddess by the name of Gfaxxy Quluwmcy but she's not here so... Yeah...”

Lucy said “Bare in mind now that I am a pet and there are a lot of people to consider so I can't really offer you an ironclad guarantee with this. Would you like Galla to look after you during your stay here? The Queen of the Weresharks has been complaining for days that we need to beef up protection for her during fights. In fact she has explicitly stated that she wants me to stand guard but-”

“But you can't be in two places at once.” said Lucy's reflection with a smile. “I get you.”

“And your not being a wereshark makes you a damn sight safer in such a position than I would be.” said Lucy

“Why?” asked Lucy's reflection.

Lucy froze then spoke with a deep voice. “Because I am the mother of the blood and I can control any wereshark.”

Galla glared at the Queen of the Weresharks.

Lucy's reflection noted how Galla's eyes glowed green and the Queen of the Wereshark's flinched at the glare.

Lucy slumped forward, exhausted. “There's just a difference between being passive and trapped in your own body, you know?”

Lucy's reflection reached forward and grabbed Lucy's hand compassionately. “Don't worry, I'll see she doesn't hurt you.”

Greta whispered in the ear of Lucy's reflection.

Lucy's reflection leaned back. “It would seem Lucy that none of you are as weak as or innocent as you appear but do not worry we accept your offer. It seems your ship offers a service Greta has dearly needed since we were stranded here. We will investigate and neutralise the force pulling people here together.”

Lucy smiled. “Then we need to think of a different name for one of us.”

“Butterfly.” said Galla decisively. “My Lucy's name is Butterfly.”

Lucy's reflection raised an eyebrow. “Butterfly?”

Lucy hissed. “I thought you wanted to save me from embarrassment.”

“Butterfly it is.” said First Officer Lucy with a grin.

Butterfly went red in the face. “Tame us, tame us now. I want us to talk privately. They won't hurt us.”

Galla nodded and started to stroke Butterfly.

Greta asked Lucy. “Will you be alright with this? There's something I have to attend to.”

“What? Oh, will I be okay being petted to the point of losing sapience before a hundred strangers? Er, yeah, I think I can pull that off.” said First Officer Lucy.

Greta nodded. “I'm glad you have this in hand.”

First Officer Lucy climbed over the table and found a seat beside Galla. “I hope you're good, girl, I really hope you're good.”

Nadine was organising the smooth exit of the fairies and the orcs.

Greta made her way over to the Queen of the Weresharks and asked. “Tell me how much you know.”

The Queen of the Weresharks laughed. “So you can tell your little friends about me?”

Greta smiled and leaned to whisper into the Queen of the Weresharks ears. “Because I can pulverise your hearts in a fraction of a second and because my limbs are robotic they don't need me to be alive to know where to hit you.”

Greta leaned back and grinned a nice big smile, showing off all her teeth.

The colour drained from the face of the Queen of the Weresharks.

“Not so nice to learn you're not the apex predator any more, is it?” said Greta sweetly. “Now why don't we go for a nice relaxing walk while we talk, say to deck 3?”

The Queen of the Weresharks swallowed. “I didn't suppose it would help if I threatened Lucy's life, would it?”

Greta shook her head. “My Lucy is not some damsel in distress. She is a skilled and experienced officer. Threats against her don't work on me because I know her to be more capable than I.”

“Shit.” said the Queen of the Weresharks.

***

Lucy woke up naked save for her collar. Beside her was Butterfly, the Lucy who belonged to Galla.

Lucy started examining the room. It was large, minimalist and circular. There was a translucent orange dome for a ceiling and the floor and walls seemed to have been cast as a single piece of white plastic.

Lucy saw that the ceiling seemed to be made from different sections with ridges and could presumably telescope back. Studying the lip where the ceiling closed against the wall of the room she noticed something. She ran over to study it further.

Most obvious on this section of the wall was a large metal pipe just over an inch in diameter with a ball in the end to stop water dripping out when it wasn't being drunk from.

To the right of the pipe were three draws. The left draw contained breakfast bars. The middle draw contained assorted fruits and prepared and packaged salads. The right most draw contained assorted cuts of ready to eat snacking meat like chicken legs and pepperami but also prepared and packaged meat sandwiches.

There were two exits to the room, both through circular corridors.

Butterfly jerked her leg suddenly rolled over to nuzzle the floor.

Lucy walked over to Butterfly and started examining her, jealous of the woman's emerald green bikini. Butterfly had a lot of barely visible scars and blemishes. The sylph pill was supposed to photoshop your body to perfection and only preserved what you felt was quintessentially you. Butterfly clearly felt very deeply that these scars and blemishes were part of who she was.

“Boo!” said Butterfly with a deep voice, her eyes suddenly open.

Lucy glared at the possessed Butterfly. “I'm not afraid of you, you know?”

“You should.” said the possessed Butterfly. “One scratch against your dear sweet skin and I will own you.”

Lucy laughed. “Greta's with you, isn't she?”

“She is not!” barked the possessed Butterfly.

Lucy nodded then blinked and suddenly her eyes were glowing green. “Do you know what this means?”

The possessed Butterfly backed against the wall. “No. No, it can't be.”

“It means, my dear, that I am the heir to the might of the Great Farsh-nuke. All his soul, all his power, all his godlike abilities, are mine.” said Lucy as she crawled over the possessed Butterfly.

The possessed Butterfly laughed nervously. “You're bluffing.”

“Why would I bluff?” asked Lucy curiously “If you could make me into your toy you'd have done it by now. Just one drop of blood in mine and I'd be yours.” To emphasize this she grabbed one of the possessed Butterfly's hands and placed it on her naked butt cheek. “Go on, make me your toy.”

The possessed Butterfly whimpered. “I can't, she won't let me.”

Lucy nodded/ “Because the Farsh-nuke is a clever man who does not trust blood. He made it so he outranks you. And I am his heir. Lucy obeys me. Isn't that lovely? Lucy really is her own woman.”

Butterfly woke up, not something easily noticed when possessed but her voice resumed its normal pitch. “I'm glad you agree. Now unless you want to fuck I suggest we go in search of clothes.”

Lucy bit her lip. “It is tempting.”

Butterfly laughed. “Buy me dinner first.”

Lucy laughed and got to her feet then pulled Butterfly up. “What is this place?”

“A hamster cage.” said Butterfly with a shrug.

“Oh!” said Lucy as a thousand clues clanged like anvils in her head. “And this is all carefully programmed and engineered to let us be as hamsters?”

“Yep.” said Butterfly, strolling towards one of the corridors.

“Do you spend time in here much?” asked Lucy

“More than I'd like.” said Butterfly.

Butterfly and Lucy climbed the translucent plastic tubes that were the corridors thanks to shifting gravity fields.

“I'd quite like to live here actually.” said Lucy in awe as she looked around.

“You're more than welcome to.” said Butterfly dryly. “I've woken up here more often now that the Hooded Justice arrived.”

Lucy sighed wistfully. “Can't stay here long, I'm afraid. I've got a war to fight. What's this about a hooded justice?”

Butterfly said. “The tall woman at our talk. Her name is Nadine Kikelomo but she's a superhero called the Hooded Justice. She and Galla are an item so I am petted out of my mind and deposited here. They know that I can look after myself here even when I'm under so it suits them.”

Lucy frowned. “But not you, right?”

Butterfly bit her lip. “I shouldn't have said that.”

Lucy chuckled.

Butterfly led them out of the tubes into a circular room with a translucent green roof filled with hat and shoe boxes and clothes rails.

Lucy's jaw dropped. “This is awesome.”

Butterfly nodded. “And we should be the same size, plus I liked to have a few sizes either way just in case.”

Lucy beamed at Butterfly. “Okay just so we're clear. Nothing productive is going to happen for the next half hour because I am just going to be trying on suits.”

***

The Queen of the Weresharks was strapped within a comfy chair, screaming as a vast contraption span around her head, scanning her brain with complex logic fields.

Greta stood back, her arms crossed, idly watching a readout screen “Amazing thing, the Aurora Chair. It can forcibly uncover any memories, thanks to logic fields scanning the brain, and because you're functionally immortal and the Logicios have better tech than the Scarrans and the Peacekeepers combined this hologrammatic recreation can scan even deeper. Uncovering even the deepest of memories. Only when I am certain that you are spent will I cease the Aurora Chair scanning your mind and even then I may be tempted to keep it scanning because you are a mind rapist and I want to watch you suffer.”

***

Lucy pulled on the long coat once more and said. “Okay, Butterfly, now we can talk”

Butterfly stepped out, she wore a cream and fawn toned suit. Lucy wore a lot of brown and red broken up by the occasional hint of green or gold.

“First, I need to take you somewhere it is safe to talk.” said Butterfly.

Butterfly led Lucy back the way they had come and out the other corridor leading off from the main

room. This room was more recognisably a hamster cage for people. The floor and the bottom half of the walls was a large red plastic tray. The ceiling and top half of the walls was a metal work cage with a very obvious hatch.

“That doesn't actually work, does it?” said Lucy worriedly

“Oh yeah.” said Butterfly with a smirk. “The Logicios make their fantasies reality. I mean Logicio ships work by manipulating logic fields, makes no difference what fields are being manipulated and even outside the ship the logic fields can be programmed to hold.”

The floor was lined with foam fragments and there was a ball pit beneath the tube they entered through. There was a jacuzzi in the opposite corner and near by it a ramp to a second level with a feeding station and bed. Opposite the ramp, on the wall nearest them, was a running wheel.

Butterfly led Lucy beneath the second level. At first there were just bookshelves and coat hooks but then Lucy noticed the lockable door Butterfly was heading to. Through it Lucy found an early 21st century style office. No doubt the computer here could connect and make use of all the ship's facilities though. Well, with a little hacking. Lucy noticed another almost hidden door behind Butterfly but she chose not to mention it just yet.

Butterfly directed Lucy to the office chair then pulled a folding chair out of the wall.

“Galla.” said Butterfly.

Lucy nodded. “Galla. Tell me what you know?”

“We were the first, I think.” said Butterfly. “First Galla and Woking then me and the Queen of the Weresharks then things started appearing all over the place, slowly, gradually. We missed most of it as we were so busy crossing the Western Half of the Roman Empire to see how far this extended.”

“And it's just Woking and the Western Half of the Roman Empire?”

“Yes. Just two land masses suspended within a part of the multiverse. Green nothingness all around.”

Lucy asked. “And the people you've seen?”

“All women, biologically anyway. All strong and powerful too.” said Butterfly.

“And we're the only dopplegangers you've seen?” asked Lucy.

Butterfly nodded.

“Curious.” mused Lucy. “Two landmasses and two women appear right by each other, very close together. One of whom is now a pet to the other.”

Butterfly shrugged. “It's just coincidence.”

“I'm not so sure.” said Lucy. “Does Galla have any sort of a dark past, anything that might lead you to be suspicious of her?”

Butterfly studied Lucy carefully, unsure what she was saying. “Well she did once kill a guy but that

was after he'd kidnapped her and tortured her. No court in the land would convict her for that."

Lucy barked. "Ha! I know courts that have ruled Sylphs should get the death sentence because they refused to have sex with Logicios that kidnapped them."

"Gosh! Really?" asked Butterfly, aghast.

Lucy waved away the issue. "That's by the by, just something on my to do list. My point is I noticed something rather troubling at the trial."

"Oh yeah?" asked Butterfly.

Lucy made her eyes glow with the power of the Farsh-nuke. "I saw your owner give these kind of glowy eyes to the Queen of the Weresharks when you were possessed and she visibly flinched, freeing you. Then, just now, when you were possessed I freed you by turning on the glowy eyes and the Queen of the Weresharks reacted with the terror of a rape victim upon seeing a rapist."

"No." said Butterfly quietly.

Lucy stopped the glowy eyes. "We both know the Farsh-nuke, right? We know how his power manifested. Under traumatic circumstances where the elder god took control."

Butterfly said nothing, horror dawning on her face.

Lucy continued. "Now imagine poor Galla all alone in that man's basement when he goes too far or too hard and an elder god used to shredding universes with no care for the pain or feelings of their host awakens to defend and avenge their vessel. It won't fully go back to sleep. It will wait, it will watch and it will punish that which it sees hurting an innocent."

Butterfly said. "When Galla got me – Well it's not like we had talked about it or even considered it. - We were just sort of attracted and then I got withdrawal from being without an owner for so long. Then Galla and the Queen of the Weresharks summoned the Farsh-nuke and he decided to give me to her. Properly transferred the logic of me wanting to obey and be his pet to her. Maybe that's it?"

"Aww, darling." said Lucy compassionately. "I'm sorry but the Queen of the Weresharks can't infect the Farsh-nuke. She infected the Farsh-nuke's host and that's who gave you over to Galla."

Butterfly nodded. "I guess I was just hoping. Besides it answers the question of what Galla's doing here. I mean Sylphs, Weresharks, Logicios, Charicthy and so many magical and fantastical species or people and then randomly one waitress come shop assistant from Woking. It makes no sense for her to be here otherwise."

Lucy nodded. "And what's her full name?"

"Galla Placidia, why?"

Lucy said. "I've been cramming up on history as part of this war I've got to plan and orchestrate so of course I looked at the Romans and I remember one little tid bit."

Butterfly glared at her "Then say it?"

"A prominent name from the Western Roman Empire circa 420 CE-ish. One Galla Placidia, Regent

to the then Emperor of the Western half of The Roman Empire Valentinian the Third.” said Lucy.

Butterfly gasped. “Two Lucys, two Gallas and two landmasses.”

Lucy nodded “And not to be rude or anything but the Regent to the Western Half of the Roman empire and the heir to the Great Farsh-nuke and the Western half of the Roman Empire itself versus a waitress, a sylph looking for an owner and Woking.”

Butterfly nodded. “Ancient wonder and modern sophistication. It makes sense. The best of both worlds. Your knowledge and beauty, my abilities and humbleness.”

Lucy blushed. “You think I'm beautiful”

“So to recap. Galla's the host to an Elder God and something drew her, me and Woking here just as it drew you, the Western half of the Roman Empire and the original Galla here and when we find her, we wrap this up?” asked Butterfly.

“Maybe.” said Lucy. “And maybe we are falling into whatever the villain's trap is. I mean why bring the orcs and stuff here?”

“Curiouser and curiouser.” said Butterfly. “But I'm afraid I have to leave you. You said you wanted to stay here? Well this cage is the only place you'll need to be. That computer is connected to the ship computer as you no doubt guessed by the way and in that door behind you is -” Butterfly waved a Quantum Oscillator, that was lying on the desk, at the hidden door. It sprang inwards to reveal a plush bathroom with toilet included.

Butterfly walked around Lucy and entered the bathroom to retrieve a stone statue of a fairy.

Lucy watched as Butterfly blew fairy dust on the statue. It regainied true colours and came back to life.

Flitzy snapped angrily at Butterfly. “You weren't supposed to use that spell on me.”

Butterfly laughed. “It's okay Flitzy I've got you a new toy. She's just like me but without being a fairy or wereshark. Feel free to turn her to stone if she starts getting difficult.”

Lucy stared at Butterfly, gobsmacked.

“Oh, don't worry” said Butterfly. “I was only joking. Flitzy knows to obey me and be a good little nymph. In all seriousness though if the boredom or lack of owner does get to you just have Flitzy turn you to stone on the upper level. I'll be sure to check regularly and bring you back to life for a play or a pet.”

Lucy said carefully. “Butterfly, I am touched by your compassion and treatment of me but the war I have to orchestrate. It's for the fate of all reality. If you forget me, the multiverse could end.”

“Good thing I have a spare of you then isn't it?” said Butterfly, referring to Lucy's egg. “Now I really have to go. Good luck with your research.”

Lucy nodded. “And you, be careful of Galla. It might not be wise to tell her what she is.”

Butterfly nodded and left the room.

Lucy booted up the computer “Heir to the Farsh-nuke, First Officer of the UCMS Paragon, Ambassador for the sylphs, Head of the war effort against the Septagonoids, pet of a goddess and here I am charged with using wikipedia. What a fantastic use of my skills.”

Flitzy hovered behind Lucy's shoulder. “I could make you into a fairy”

“No, thank you.” said Lucy dryly.

Chapter 10
The End Of The Beginning

Nadine was just instructing General Galbion to drive the bus and keep it headed toward Rome when and old grey man in a suit tapped her on the shoulder.

Nadine turned to look at the man and saluted. “Mr President, Sir!”

“At ease, Nadine.” said the President. “I wondered if you wanted me to buy you a scotch?”

Nadine smiled. “It would be an honour.”

The President smiled. “Thank you, I know a little bar on deck 2 I've been dying to try out.”

Nadine followed the President up the stairs to deck 2 and asked. “If you don't mind me asking, Sir, why do you need me with you to try out a bar?”

The President shrugged. “Rule 1 of drinking responsibly: Never drink alone. So long as you only drink in company then you can control yourself around alcohol when you need to.”

“Ah.”

“Plus what's the point in having a good drink if no one else is?”

Nadine nodded at that wisdom and they walked the rest of the way to deck 2 in silence.

When they arrived at the bar the President stopped to let Nadine enter first. “Ladies first.”

Nadine chuckled. “Been a while since anyone called me a lady.”

The President entered after Nadine and gestured to the wood panelled 40s style bar with imitation healthy smoke. “What do you think?”

“Very classy.” said Nadine.

The President opened a bottle of Glenfiddich and poured a tumbler of whisky for himself and Nadine.

They each took their tumblers and headed over to where two armchairs sat in a quiet corner, facing each other, a table in between. The President took the seat with its back to the wall.

Nadine sipped the whisky and smiled.

The President sipped his whisky and said. “Got a pleasant after taste, don't you think?”

Nadine nodded.

The President chuckled. “You're good. No prodding or prompting. Just listening. Well, all right, there is a reason why I want to talk with you besides the excuse to drink whisky.”

Nadine gave a Cheshire Cat grin. “Why, Mr President, the merest glimmer of a thought had never even begun crossing my mind.”

“Ha!” barked the President but then he looked sombrely into his drink. “I heard the commotion. You arranged quite the escort for our honoured guests.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well you reminded me of me when I was younger. You see I wasn't always the old curmudgeon you see before you. I used to be quite the looker. And I used to be a woman.”

Nadine stared blankly back at the President.

The President chuckled lightly. “Right, I know, what a surprise? Everyone we've met so far has been female. Well there was a war. We won. We won and we pushed out the Logicios and the Farsh-nuke. It was a hard war but we won and then there came the question of what to do next. This war had started as a feminist uprising then became a fight to reassert our human rights. I mean we made mistakes, we were harsher than we needed to be at times, all wars have that. But there was a tension. The minority leading the charge wanted not just equality but domination while the majority of our fighters and allies just believed that human rights had to be defended and protected.”

Nadine sipped her drink. “So what happened?”

The President said darkly. “There was a coup. I was involved. We murdered the minority wanting domination and took over ourselves. We parodied them. Hence my becoming a man. I became the quintessential patriarchal figure and I delivered all the speeches and plans they had talked about with that persona. Amazing how quick feminists are to cry injustice at fellow feminists when they happen to be men. Here's the thing though. We talked their talk but walked our walk. During my time in office I restored equality, funded campaigns to spread awareness and provided charities and utilities to those affected by the fall out of the war on both sides. Still the feminists realised the way I was talking was not right so the radical domination movement died.”

Nadine sipped her drink. “And you think I need to understand that for all I might die a hero, I should be prepared for the fact that others will see me as the villain?”

The President smiled sadly. “I wouldn't put it quite like that but yeah. You may lead us all to safety and salvation but that doesn't mean everybody is going to like you for it. There will always be people who think you are scum who deserves to die, if you can't take that, get out of the spotlight.”

Nadine laughed.

***

Greta loaded the information from the Aurora Chair into a memory gun round then shot herself with it. She turned to switch off the Aurora Chair and released the Queen of the Weresharks from her

bindings.

The Queen of the Weresharks stood up then feebly tried to attack Greta.

Greta ignored the attack and led the Queen of the Weresharks downstairs to the ground floor.

When they reached the kitchen Greta opened a chest freezer. Inside was a naked Lucy. This one even lacked a collar.

“Make her rise.” said Greta.

“Please, I am weak.” said the Queen of the Weresharks.

Greta looked into the Queen of the Weresharks' eyes and spoke slowly. She enunciatied every syllable like an order. “Make. Her. Rise.”

The Queen of the Weresharks found a seat in the dining area of the kitchen and focused her mind.

The body of Lucy opened its eyes and shivered. She climbed out of the freezer and approached Greta.

“How does it feel?” asked Greta.

“Good.” said the body of Lucy

Greta nodded and hugged the body. “I know how it feels to be inadequate. I understand.”

“I'm not inadequate.” said the body of Lucy. “I am the Queen of the Weresharks. I have more power in my left pinky than the Elder Gods combined.”

Greta nodded. “That you do. That I do. But it doesn't help, does it? You can tell yourself size and shape doesn't matter as much as you want but when you look at your friends and see that society has decided that they are objectively prettier and better than you, it's hard not to feel jealous.”

“I'm not jealous.” said the Queen of the Weresharks defensively.

Greta snorted. “You don't think I feel it? You don't think I look at my Lucy sometimes and wonder 'Why her? Why does she get to look like that? I have killed more people than her. I am a better fighter than her. I am a better tactician.’”

The Queen of the Weresharks stroked Greta's cheek. “But you're beautiful? Your might and your majesty. You are the noblest species in the multiverse. Humans are just kittens playing with technology. The Charicthy have knowledge and wisdom beyond any human race.”

Greta nodded and stroked the Queen of the Wereshark's cheek. “As are you. I know you envy, Lucy. You want her power, her ability to be passive and submissive. To love and be loved but you aren't a sylph and you aren't a human. You aren't even a Wereshark. You are The Last Great Werewolf.

The Queen of the Weresharks started crying. “I am the failure. I am the Werewolf that fucked it all up. That great dynasty ended with me. Can you blame me for wanting another life, another destiny, to not be remembered as the one who fucked it all up?”

Greta shook her head and stroked the Queen of the Weresharks, “Of course I don't blame you. You have done terrible things but we all have. I think that's why we're here. You have been fighting your whole life, fighting to survive, fighting to ensure some kind of legacy. Now it's time for you to rest.”

Greta led the Queen of the Weresharks over to the table before where she still sat, concentrating on the blood control.

Greta cleared the table and pulled her coat off to serve as a blanket and her waistcoat off to serve as a pillow, the queen of the Weresharks asked. “What are you doing?”

“Getting you some rest.” said Greta as she helped the Queen of the Weresharks lift the body of Lucy onto the table.

The Queen of the Weresharks lay Lucy’s body down on the table, her head on the improvised pillow as Greta draped the improvised blanket over her. “Are you comfortable?”

The Queen of the Weresharks nodded. “But what about my real body?”

Greta said. “Return to it and resume the real you. Become The Last Great Werewolf again.”

The body of Lucy closed her eyes.

The body of the Queen of the Weresharks changed, becoming a great wolf.

Greta cleared more of the table and patted it.

The Last Great Werewolf jumped upon the table and curled up. Then she slept. Her body slept in the guise of the Wolf, her mind slept in the body of Lucy.

“Right.” said Greta. “Now the hard work begins”

***

Butterfly exited the hamster cage and found Galla in tears on the bed.

Butterfly was immediately at Galla's side, nuzzling her. “What is it, Galla?”

Galla squeezed Butterfly and wiped her nose with a hanky then said. “I did a bad thing.”

Butterfly squeezed Galla back. “What did you do?”

Galla wheezed. “I violated the Queen of the Weresharks. I raped her with my mind and now you know, don't you? The other Lucy helped you figure it out. I'm a monster.”

Butterfly hugged Galla. “You are not a monster. I manipulated a little boy and made him fancy me so he might liberate my people. My last owner founded a conspiracy to kill, eat and keep women as pets. The Queen of the Weresharks herself has been pretty keen on doling out the mindrape. You are not an innocent but neither of us are and I understand why you did what you did.”

“Oh, do you?” said Galla, her eyes glowing.

Butterfly recoiled and sat up in bed.

Galla laughed, sitting up too. “Not so forgiving when dear, sweet, sniffling Galla becomes confident, powerful me, are you?”

“Who are you?” asked Butterfly nervously.

“Who are you?” responded Galla. “You think it's just coincidence that I chose you two? You are the Farsh-nuke's little lapdog reincarnated throughout the multiverse. You were chosen because you have the power to be a useful pawn and the mindset to be a loving pet and friend.”

Galla stroked Lucy. “Already, without my intervention, you have given yourself to me. My faithful Butterfly.”

Butterfly chilled. “I belong to Galla Placidia, not to the elder god using her body.”

Galla smiled condescendingly. “Oh, you are so cute when you are trying to stand up for your friends.”

Butterfly said icily. “I may be a sylph but I am also a wereshark and I grew up under the rule of the Farsh-nuke. I am hard and sharp as diamond if you want to try me. I will kill Galla and gladly die myself to stop you if I need to.”

Galla poked Lucy's nose. “Gosh, you're adorable. Seriously though don't worry. I am not some panto villain. I don't want to take over the multiverse. I just want to live. I mean that's what this is all about. Elder Gods don't have gender. We didn't have bodies, we didn't need it. I created everything you associate with women to rebel against the Farsh-nuke and the Bam-Kursh. I didn't intend to seed these tropes throughout all the Multiverse. I just had a very bad day once and needed to survive so I scattered pieces of my soul throughout every woman alive. Over the many many years these teeny tiny fragments met up and concentrated. This Venus Trap is my way of reconstituting myself.”

Butterfly nodded “Then what will you do with me and Galla?”

Galla thought for a second then answered. “As I see it there is a war going on and there is injustice going on. I need to join that war, it is my duty. I also need to sort out the injustices, that is also my duty. More importantly however I cannot deny my vessel’s agency. I have picked out two teams and it is up to them to decide who will go to which destiny and who will get the lion's share of my power.”

“Right...” said Butterfly, not understanding.

“Like you and Lucy.” said Galla. “One of you is the Farsh-nuke incarnate, the other is a student of the Farsh-nuke.”

“And that's why me and Lucy are here.” said Butterfly as she understood at last. “To help your vessels understand their burdens?”

Galla nodded. “And to be faithful companions. I am sorry if I scared you.”

Greta kicked the door open. “I'm sorry but this is urgent.”

Butterfly looked to Galla for guidance.

Galla got up from the bed. “Show us.”

***

Greta led Galla and Lucy to the sleeping Queen of the Weresharks and hurriedly outlined the situation “The Queen of the Weresharks is not her name, it's her duty. She is The Last Great Werewolf and all her life, for as long Weresharks have existed, she has worked tirelessly to see the survival of her bloodline and the continuing safety of her legacy. She has never stopped and never slept. She envies you, Lucy, envies your beauty and ability to be passive and at rest. She does not feel right in her own body, that's why she has been so keen to possess you. Better to be powerful and creepy than sad and pathetic. We have a chance now though, this mindless clone made from the food machine, she can inhabit it without hurting anyone.”

Galla nodded sadl.y “But that leaves her body empty and when she returns to it to eat or work, the body loses brain activity and needs to go on life support?”

Greta nodded. “I do sympathize.”

“What do we do?” asked Butterfly uncertainly. “Do you want to use me?”

Galla kissed butterfly on the cheek. “I am touched but you are needed, Lucy. Besides Galla would never consent to be my host if I let you do that. No, it's clear what the solution is here. Lucy head to Rome and find the other Galla Placidia then you may wake me and we can end this. In the meantime you and Lucy are the two smartest women I know. Together you should be able to work out some kind of solution for the Queen of the Weresharks, be it nanobots to keep the body on support whenever she vacates it or some kind of artificial migratory consciousness at her control.”

Butterfly nodded.

Galla looked to Greta. “When I do this I may fall or collapse and suffer some kind of amnesia, Lucy will explain everything in good time. See that I am laid gently on my bed and that Nadine Kikelomo, the Hooded Justice, is made aware of everything so that when I wake she can be there to comfort me.”

Greta nodded and got ready to catch Galla.

Galla reached out a hand to touch the forehead of each body of the Queen of the Weresharks then she whispered. “Geronimo.”

Galla's eyes stopped glowing and she fell unconscious.

Greta caught Galla and carried her between her arms.

Butterfly ran into her room and said. “Go get, Nadine. I won't be a minute”

Butterfly disappeared into the hamster cage.

Chapter 11
Body Trouble

Galla woke from a dreamless sleep to find Nadine standing over her.

Lucy and Butterfly were at her sides.

Nadine said. “What I have to tell you isn't easy but it needs to be said and you should know that we all love you.”

Butterfly nuzzled Galla. “I know we're not Uni but we're here if you need us.”

Lucy nodded.

So Nadine told her, told her everything Lucy, Butterfly and Greta had worked out and discovered.

Galla lay back and listened. She listened to Nadine explain how the Lucys had worked it out while both of them buried their faces against her. She listened as Nadine explained what Galla had likely been made to do and why they were all here. She listened as Nadine explained the fate of what was possessing her.

Galla lay in silence for a moment and stroked her sylphs as Nadine stared pensively at her.

No one spoke. In that silence an age seemed to pass.

Lucy, the one whose best friend was a cyborg shark, emitted a great squeal of joy and kicked free from her trousers.

Galla spoke at last. “I think I want to go home.”

Nadine frowned.

Butterfly nuzzled Galla. “I think I can help you with that.”

Butterfly extricated herself and said. “Now you hug Lucy good, yeah? She's been organising the war and wandering Rome for ages. She needs you. I want her so blissed out she's naked, okay?”

Galla smiled. “I think I can do that, Butterfly”

Butterfly smiled back then led Nadine out of the room into the console room.

Nadine was visibly worried. “What are we going to do, there's no way back for any of us.”

“There is for her.” said Butterfly as she studied the console controls “She was brought here with her home and my ship can easily open a door there because it logs the position every time a door is summoned but it's going to take time. Having the other Lucy there is going to buy us some time but only some.”

Nadine stared at Butterfly. “Wait you brought Lucy along just so Galla would be distracted by making her go under?”

Butterfly looked up from the controls. “I have done far worse before. Galla is a friend. Lucy is an asset. If it makes you feel any better I'm sure Lucy sees me as just as much of an asset to exploit. Now if you'll excuse me I am trying to prevent my friend and your girlfriend from committing suicide.”

Nadine backed away from the controls. “Then why did you bring me out here?”

Butterfly didn't look up from her work. “Because the closer we get to Rome, the closer we are going to get to trouble and I won't be here to help you. Flitzy can lead the fairies and you'll have the use of the other Lucy. In fact I want you putting pressure and responsibility on the other Lucy. Galla will want to make her go under again when she returns so you need to make sure that Lucy is a suitable enough challenge.”

Nadine crossed her arms. “I can't do this. This is so unethical.”

Butterfly sneered. “Fine. Keep Lucy all cosied up and waiting for Galla while the shit hits the fan.”

Nadine threw up her arms in disbelief. “Fine. I'll do as you ask but what's the point? Why are you stressing?”

Butterfly laughed. “We've been told what the entire point of this mess is now. We know our mission. Just a simple drive into Rome.”

“Ah...” said Nadine as realization dawned on her face. “Like a certain 'simple walk into Mordor'? Actually that's a point, we could fly, I mean you're a fairy and we could probably get those Valkyries-?”

Butterfly glared at her. “We have a fucking bus. Driving is less effort, quicker since we can drive through the night and involves less chance of death than flying. Plus we can fit an army on a bus.”

“Good points.” Agreed Nadine awkwardly.

“Now I need to do something, something to ensure I can trust you to hold the fort but first I need to know how squeamish you are.”

Nadine almost choked from surprise. “Squeamish, why would I be squeamish? I'm an assassin for hire turned superhero.”

“And I grew up with men drugging my friends so they could eat them alive, is there anything you are squeamish about?”

Nadine shrugged. “I'm sure I have my limits but I've not yet met them.”

“Good!” said Butterfly as she turned from the console with a loaded memory gun in hand. She fired a bolt of logic between Nadine's eyes.

Nadine staggered. “You prepared the round while you were grabbing Lucy I see?”

Butterfly nodded and headed to Galla's room. “The door will only open to Woking once. Don't worry we can get back in the spaceship from Woking but you won't be able to get to us. Good luck.”

Butterfly entered Galla's room.

Lucy wore an emerald green bikini and slept soundly.

Butterfly snorted.

Galla said. “Blessed girl, I think she's all tuckered out.”

Butterfly nodded and sat beside Galla so she could stroke Lucy. “I think she thought I brought her along for her counselling skills. Still she'll have a nice sleep.”

“Thank you.” said Galla sweetly as she looked lovingly at Butterfly. “Can we go home now?”

Butterfly nodded and hugged Galla before she got up and helped Galla to her feet without disturbing Lucy.

They left the room quietly and hurried out the ship.

Galla smiled. “Back at Waitrose. You really do work miracles. Amazing to think that so much has happened in just over a week.”

Butterfly said. “A week ago I was wandering aimlessly without a clue. Now come on, I think there's a park where we can talk.”

Galla nodded and followed Butterfly.

***

Lucy woke to find Galla and Butterfly had gone and in their place sat Nadine.

“Hi.” said Lucy sheepishly.

“Hi”. said Nadine as she stroked Lucy. “I didn't mean to do this. I just came here and sat down so I could wake you when you crawled on top of me. Didn't have the heart to move you.”

Lucy chuckled. “I suppose not knowing how to deal with kittens that glomp you is a trait of all superheroes. How may I be of service to you?”

“Well, Galbion, the leader of our orc fighters, is busy driving us towards Rome and Butterfly said to expect trouble.” said Nadine.

“Makes sense.” said Lucy sagely. “Let me guess? She also instructed that I am to make up for her and be worked nice and hard so I'll be ripe for Galla to pet me again?”

“Yes.” said Nadine cautiously. “And you're okay with that are you?”

Lucy sighed. “She's me. A bit cuter, more endearing and deadly perhaps but she's me. I'd have made the same choice if our situations were flipped. Now tell me where is the hologram room?”

Nadine blanked then frowned. “Deck 7 but-”

“But Butterfly didn't want me to know that.” said Lucy with a smile. “Now I believe I should get dressed if I have work to do. I suggest you suit up too.”

Nadine nodded. “I think you might be right. If we are without Galla and Butterfly, the Hooded Justice will be needed.”

***

The Last Great Werewolf dreamed. She dreamed of dancing and flirting, of parties and conferences, of the love of another and falling asleep in the arms of someone she trusted. One memory kept interrupting the dreams:

Old. So old now. Older than any werewolf before her. 3000 years old and looking it. She was grey haired and that hair was thinning in places. Her joints ached now, her claws and feet were worn away from callouses and injuries. Her vision was going and her ears were only as good as a humans now. She'd pulled in all the favours she had left to get to the Galapagos and get some hope for survival. That hope was gone now. No species here reacted to her bites either.

As she bent down to get a drink of water, she looked at her reflection. What a sad way to go. What a pathetic waste of a life. A woman appeared in the reflection beside her.

It was Galla, except it's eyes glowed green. “It's okay you know. My babies will fix you.”

The shark lunged, it's jaws opening. Just for a second the reflection of The Last Great Werewolf was overlaid upon the shark. It breached the water and snapped the neck of The Last Great Werewolf as it flung her body high into the air to land face down in the water. Then the shark returned and swallowed the dead animal whole.

Except The Last Great Werewolf, who had fought for so long, was not quite dead yet. She tore through the inside of the shark and bit into its heart. She might not have been able to save the werewolf bloodline but she could sure as hell avenge it. All that blood, passion and desperation. All that life she had thrown away in some desperate attempt to find meaning. It poured into the shark and it changed the shark and she had lived within the blood of every wereshark since then.

“But weresharks aren't werewolves are they?” asked Galla as she accepted a coffee from a waitress at Starbucks.

The Last Great Werewolf was wearing Lucy's body and dressed for a night on the town. She sipped at a coffee that was in her hands. A machiato, nice. Then she said. “The werewolves are dead. I failed them.”

“You bought them time.” said Galla gently. “My girls are smart they'll sort you out.”

The Last Great Werewolf laughed. “How? I tried for 3000 years to create werewolves and I failed. How are they going to fare any better?”

Galla pondered. “3 reasons. Reason number 1. They have a sample that works. Wereshark blood. The blood of a werewolf lies within. Reason number 2. Lucy's a fairy with a couple of elder gods helping her. Reason number 3. We are in a hyper advanced battle ship with the latest in science and magic at our disposal.”

The Last Great Werewolf put down her coffee. “Okay then why would they help me? I'm a monster who wants to bring back a race that turns into dangerous wolves come full moon.”

Galla said simply. “Because they're your friends.”

The Last Great Werewolf laughed.

***

The Last Great Werewolf woke from her dream to find Lucy stood over her.

Lucy wore a three piece suit and carried two leashes. “Walkies!”

The Last Great Werewolf got off the table and followed Lucy.

When they reached Deck 7 The Last Great Werewolf asked. “Why are you helping me?”

Lucy shrugged. “Because you saved the life of my other self's owner.”

The Last Great Werewolf nodded. “Of course.”

“And because it will be a nice distraction to have the werewolves back just as I am establishing my own army.” said Lucy dryly

“Maybe I might concede to let you have some wereshark forces?” asked The Last Great Werewolf.

“Oh, I could never ask that of you” said Lucy dismissively.

The Last Great Werewolf's eyes glowed green for a second and she chuckled under her breath. “Don't ask for anything, every sign of hospitality is the signing of a contract you don't know the terms of.”

Lucy snorted.

At last they found the entrance to the hologram generator. Lucy zapped the controls with a quantum oscillator and a couple of teleport pads appeared. Lucy asked. “Ever seen the Star Trek Voyager episode Tuvix?

The Last Great Werewolf's eyes glowed green for a second and she asked. “If you're okay with me going for a joy ride?”

Lucy laughed. “Get on the pad. I just need to merge your two bodies and filter out the shark dna then do a little bit of recoding.”

The body of The Last Great Werewolf stepped onto one teleport pad then the mindless clone of Lucy stepped onto the other teleport pad.

The Last Great Werewolf's eyes glowed green for a second and she said. “Seriously, girl, come over here and let me into your body, that way we might be able to do this smoothly. I am not about to be vaporised and escaping at the last minute might result in this body having a nasty accident.”

“Fine.” said Lucy icily as she approached carefully.

The Elder God that had been posessing Galla body hopped from one Lucy to the other then raised the new body's quantum oscillator to keep old body standing and stable. She backed away to the controls and with her spare hand hurriedly conjured up a hologram to hold the quantum oscillator for her. Then Lucy and the Elder God worked as one to programme the teleport.

***

Galla and Butterfly walked back to Waitrose and the ship.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” asked Butterfly. “I can put everything back. Give you your old life back.”

Galla shrugged. “I have lived more in these 8 days than I have ever lived before. I have loved more and done more. And now I have a destiny to face.”

“If you're sure.” said Butterfly as she opened the door of the ship.

Galla entered.

***

Lucy and the Elder God that had been possessing Galla checked their calculations. It seemed like it would work. “Ready!”

The Last Great Werewolf barked.

Lucy worked.

The teleport started. The body of The Queen of the Weresharks and the mindless clone body of Lucy disintegrated and were rebuilt as one entity.

Butterfly and Galla opened the door and watched as a woman with the face of the Queen of the Weresharks and the body of Lucy stepped off the teleport platform.

“Presenting the Werewolf 2.0, her majesty Queen of the Weresharks, Mother of the Blood, Alpha and Omega.” said Lucy.

“Lily.” said the Werewolf 2.0, her majesty Queen of the Weresharks, Mother of the Blood, Alpha and Omega. “Short for Lillith. Galla, dear, might you have room for one more? Somehow I don't think I'll be sleeping with the fishes any more.”

Galla laughed. “The more the merrier.”

Lucy's eyes glowed green as she asked Galla. “And me?”

Galla swallowed

The Elder God possessing Lucy laughed. “If you don't want to, you don't have to. This one is willing for the moment and I'm sure another mindless clone could be knocked up.”

Galla said carefully. “Except you don't inhabit the body do you? This isn't blood control. You bond with the soul. I have known you for as long as I can remember. We can work as one, I will be your vessel, I will use your power.”

The Elder God possessing Lucy nodded and kissed Galla.

Galla's eyes glowed green as the Elder God body hopped.

Lucy collapsed but was caught by Galla.

“You owe me that cuddle remember?” said Galla with a wink.

Lucy laughed. “That I do. Butterfly, you coming?”

“In a bit.” said Butterfly.

Galla left with Lucy.

“Nice body.” said Butterfly.

“Thanks.” said Lily awkwardly. “Listen you're not still upset with me about the whole… Thing... Are you?”

Butterfly whispered in Lily's ear. “The moment I no longer need you I am killing you to avoid werewolves coming back to the multiverse.”

Lily said. “But I'm still the only wielder with blood control. You need me.”

Butterfly hugged Lily. “For now.”

Lily swallowed and left.

Butterfly said. “Computer, display all the records recovered by the Aurora Chair that was last loaded. I want to test a theory.”

Chapter 12
Dang Asylum Seekers

Lucy, Galla and Lily entered Deck 1, on route to the bedroom but Nadine barred the way. She was dressed in her superhero costume and said. “We've got company.”

Lucy looked to Galla.

Galla said. “I'll get the troops ready. You two buy us some time.”

Greta stepped out of the lift, “I'm going with her”

The Hooded Justice, Lucy and Greta exited the ship. And then the bus.

General Galbion saluted from her position in the driver's seat then ran inside the ship.

Approaching the bus from the front of the ship was about a hundred or so humanoids, all charging towards the bus.

Lucy strode towards the wave of people flanked by The Hooded Justice and Greta.

Lucy called out. “Hello! I am First Officer Lucille Danse of the UCMS Paragon! This is Greta! This is the Hooded Justice! How may we help you!?”

“Asylum!!!” cried the mob as one.

Greta said. “I can taste the dead and the dying from here, they're serious.”

The Hooded Justice said. “I'll go let Galla know we don't have an army to fight but civilians to heal.”

The Hooded Justice sprinted back towards the bus and the ship.

Lucy and Greta walked through the terrified mob. They saw sylphs and weresharks, humans and elves, dwarves and orcs. They saw bleeding, diseased, malnourished, dehydrated, drunk, in pain, the elderly, children and the disfigured.

Lucy was horrified and started crying in sympathy.

Greta's nose twitched and she pulled out her guns.

Lucy was shocked by Greta but then she heard the gunfire and the screaming. Suddenly it was them, two lone figures, against 200 robots with lazer pistols.

“Shit.” said Lucy.

“Just remember, reinforcements are coming. All we have to do is keep their attention while the civilians get inside the ship.” said Greta.

“Right.” said Lucy as she started running.

Greta held her ground and shot a robot's head off. The rest of the robot kept moving. So Greta started disarming the robots with careful sniping shots.

Lucy ran in a curving arc through the robots, firing wildly. Every now and then a stray blast of plasma knocked a robots head off or blew a leg or an arm off but that wasn't the point. The point was that every time Lucy came within 5 feet of a robot it turned to shoot at her. And every time Lucy bobbed and weaved to avoid the blow.

***

The Console room had been turned into a makeshift triage clinic to identify the seriously injured for treatment in the kitchen by Lily, Galla and helpers created from the fairies and orcs with the aid of memory guns.

The Hooded Justice and General Galbion visited each of the injured and gave them info from a memory gun if they were well enough to help identifying people.

General Galbion was treating an Elf that had been shot in the arse when she heard her patient say. “Bastards wouldn't give up, kept shooting even when they saw your friends.”

General Galbion patched up the wound so it wouldn't get infected then walked over to Butterfly as she entered the console room.

General Galbion whispered. “Assign 10 of your dumbest fairies to help out here then get outside and back up the other you, it's just her and that shark against a fuckton of robots at the moment.”

Butterfly stiffened, nodded slightly then entered Galla's room. She found the double layered hamster cage, opened the ceiling hatch and retrieved a small stone statue from inside. She blew fairy dust on the statue.

A very tiny Flitzy Honeytoast came to life in Butterfly's hands. She blew a raspberry at Butterfly.

Butterfly whispered. “I need 10 fairies helping the injured then I want the rest outside with me and you safely returned to stone in your cage, understood?”

Flitzy nodded and flew off.

Butterfly pulled on her combat gear.

***

Lucy was getting tired now and making mistakes. She had been shot 3 times and the near misses were hindering her ability to heal the hits. Her skin was red and black from the radiation and burning.

The robots had advanced 3 quarters of the way towards Greta and she had only disarmed 10 robots.

Lucy started stopping to make targeted attacks at the bases of the robots' legs now. It was buying her precious stamina but getting her shot more. A chance shot to her offhand meant she could no longer securely hold the plasma rifle between both hands. No more run and gun even if she wanted to. After 3 more increasingly erratic mid combat sniping shots her left leg was first shot out from under her then sliced off and blown away by coordinated lazer fire on the off-chance that she could heal that fast.

Lucy fell to the ground and exploited her position by sweeping her arms and legs back and forth to trip up or delay robots until at last her limbs were all sliced off and blown away. Most of the robots walked over her at that point but a paranoid few took aim at Lucy's neck.

Fwumpsh!!!

A wave of magical fire washed over the robots, seemingly caused by a great ruby coloured dragon flying over head. The robots all turned to shoot upwards.

Butterfly fell out of the sky, knocked robots over like skittles and started collecting up Lucy's limbs and putting them in her bag.

Greta charged into melee combat, eviscerating robot after robot in a rampage of revenge.

The illusory dragon vanished.

The robots turned their attention towards Greta.

Butterfly hugged Lucy's head and torso then flew up and forwards.

Greta's cybernetic limbs exploded. The sheer ferocity of the raging shark kept it mowing down robots for a few more moments.

The robots turned their attention towards Butterfly.

Butterfly fell to the ground behind Greta and blew fairy dust at Greta.

The robots blasted away at the stone statue of Greta and half exploded Butterfly.

“Fire!” cried General Galbion.

3 lines of Orc infantry proceeded to mow down the first few lines of robots.

30 fairies flew over and retrieved Lucy, Butterfly and Greta then carried them inside the ship. The spare fairies zipped around the front lines and healed orcs, gave them defences and took robot blasts.

***

Butterfly, Lucy and Greta were laid out on the kitchen floor.

Lily studied her patients.

Butterfly had already recovered enough to cough. “Lay Lucy down in a vat of agar jelly and her blood in a sterile room. Do it for her limbs as well. She can heal.”

Lily nodded to an orc that was helping her out.

The orc nurse took Butterfly's bag and Lucy away so she might follow Lucy's instructions.

Lily asked. “And Greta?”

Butterfly coughed up blood “Stable until I remove the petrification curse. Once done she'll need healing, the shark tank and her cyborg limbs.”

Lily nodded. “And you?”

Butterfly laughed. She looked almost okay but her internal organs were still scrambled as several massive gashes, holes and wounds were pulling themselves together. “Wereshark, sylph and fairy. Give me five minutes and I'll be back out there.”

Galla approached. “Lily, Nadine tells me that a few of the weresharks and some of the walking wounded want to go back out there and join in the fight. She says she'll lead them. Should I let her?”

Lily thought for a second then said. “More dead robots means less injured to treat, give them the all clear but make sure they're stable.”

Galla nodded and then she saw Butterfly and baulked.

Butterfly laughed. “I'm fine, don't worry.”

Galla walked over to Butterfly and knelt beside her. She placed her hand on Butterfly's chest and her eyes started to glow. “Butterfly, you are my pet and champion. I can take the pain and suffering from you now so you may heal it later. Galbion depends upon you. Fly well.”

Butterfly suddenly felt amazing and charged outside with The Hooded Justice, 5 weresharks, 2 elves, an orc and a sylph.

As 3 more critically wounded were brought before Lily and her aides, she said “Galla won't like that you know?”

Galla ignored Lily and went back to healing people.

***

The front line of General Galbion's army had fallen back to heal, reload and recover their stamina. The second line of infantry was fast losing integrity and the third line of infantry was clearly very nervous. The fairies kept the lines supplied and healed but a few were out of action being healed themselves.

Butterfly used her quantum oscillator to magnify the charge of her fairy spell again.

Fwumpsh!!!

A magical wave of fire washed over the robots as a great ruby dragon appeared above the robots.

The robots started firing at the illusory dragon.

As this happened fairies darted forward. They grabbed robot corpses and remains, petrified them and built make shift defences for the infantry to hide behind.

The second line of infantry fell back to be healed and supplemented by the civilians.

The third line was now the front line and felt confident.

The five weresharks made their way to key spread out positions among the robots. Being spread out meant they were less likely to get help if they needed it but meant they were all less likely to get hit.

The Hooded Justice and the sylph started at either side of the front line and made to sprint through the robots drawing fire and tripping or hurting them when they could.

Butterfly picked three fairies and explained that one was to be in charge of maintaining the petrified wall of robot corpse defences, one was to be in charge of distracting the robots with illusory spells or area of effect attacks. The third and final group would use all their spells to stay hidden and unnoticed so they might swoop in and rescue the distractions further up the field.

The illusory dragon disappeared.

The front line infantry attacked.

The robots attacked the frontline infantry.

The fairies maintaining the frontline infantry fell back to heal the second line infantry and the third line infantry.

The Weresharks started attacking, easily clearing circles of destruction around themselves.

The Hooded Justice and the Sylph started running through the robots, drawing their ire.

Butterfly's lieutenants ran off to gather and instruct their forces.

The robots realised quite how many fronts they were being attacked on and started focus firing on the different targets.

The defences before the infantry started to crumble under lazer fire.

The second line of infantry started firing their plasma rifles over the front line infantry to better mow down the robots.

The Weresharks were being targeted by lazer fire now but shrugged it off and carved paths through the robots.

The Hooded Justice and the Sylph ran through the robots. Their speed and winding paths made them almost impossible to be focus fired upon successfully and the attempts by the robots took out some of their own forces.

Butterfly landed silently and invisibly amid the combat and planted timed explosives as she ran through the robots towards the front lines.

The Defence Lieutenant's forces swooped in, bundled up the dead robots, petrified them and swooped out.

The Distraction Lieutenant's forces summoned 10 ruby red dragons above the robots and the resulting cacophony of ten staggered waves of magical fire effectively blinded and deafened the robots for a few seconds.

The Discreet Saviour Lieutenant's forces decided to imitate Butterfly and drop timed explosives in strategic positions.

Galbion advanced her forces behind the newly created defences and all 3 lines started firing now. Even the fairies who had been healing the troops were firing their plasma rifles.

The Weresharks were no longer being targeted by lazer fire and made merry hell as the took out great swathes of robots.

The Hooded Justice and the Sylph met up then with a nod and a gesture agreed to exploit the opportunity by carefully sniping the distracted robots.

Butterfly flew up into the air before the robots and used good fairy magic and her quantum oscillator to amplify a bad fairy power. She cried out “Hear me! You cannot win! We have you surrounded! Our troops can fight for a long time! Our best fighters are still treating the wounded even! We will gain strength as you lose strength! We will replenish our numbers while yours diminish! Surrender and you may live!”

Butterfly's decree was sent psychically and used every wereshark, fairy, sylph and human as a conduit to beam the message psychically into the very souls of the robots.

Then Butterfly's bombs exploded.

Then the Defence Lieutenant's forces built a new line of defences right up against the enemy from all the robot corpses.

Then the Distraction Lieutenant's forces summoned 10 more ruby red dragons.

Then the bombs dropped by the Discreet Saviour Lieutenant's forces exploded.

The Discreet Saviour Lieutenant's forces decided to rush the Hooded Justice and the Sylph to the safety of the ship as they would probably be better use getting more infantry and fairies on the scene.

The robots did not attack.

General Galbion knew better than to attack when the enemy had been given notice of surrender so while she advanced to the new defensive line she had her forces rest, heal and reload.

The Weresharks decided to focus their energy on healing instead of fighting.

Butterfly performed a good fairy spell and amplified it with her quantum oscillator. The robots could now communicate psychically and send her a message as one.

The Defence Lieutenant's forces started building defensive lines out of the robot corpses surrounding the weresharks.

The Distraction Lieutenant's forces sustained the illusory twenty ruby red dragons but did not have the dragons attack.

The Discreet Saviour Lieutenant took one look at the stalemate and sent most of her forces to aid in healing the injured inside the ship. Keeping only enough with her to rescue Butterfly and Galbion while sending for help.

The robots communicated the following message to Butterfly. “We apologise. We were ruled by fear of a greater power. You can protect us. We will serve you.”

“Then we will repair you!” cried Butterfly before she ordered her forces to petrify every robot and take all the robots inside the spaceship.

Butterfly helped her forces petrify every robot and when she knew every robot had been turned to stone she headed inside the ship, confident Galbion and her Lieutenants could handle the clean up of the battlefield.

***

Galla watched Butterfly enter and hurried over to her. “Hey, Butterfly, how did it go?”

Butterfly grinned upon seeing Galla. “We worked together like a well oiled machine and I got seventy five of them to surrender. We turned them all to stone so we can worry about them after we're done treating the injured.”

“Good idea.” said Galla as she steered Butterfly into her bedroom.

Butterfly followed her mistress. Even when Galla asked her to strip and lie down in the bed

Butterfly did as she was asked without question.

Galla sat on the edge of the bed and stroked Butterfly's hair. She said. “I'm glad you made such a difference in that battle. I thought you might and that's why I healed you the way I did.”

Butterfly beamed. “Well so am I, another few minutes and Galbion's forces would be wrecked and the enemy would have stormed inside the ship.”

Galla nodded. “That's why I did it. We needed you in fighting form.” Then Galla laid her hand on Butterfly's chest. “But I did not heal you. I borrowed your life and vitality from a time after you were injured and now as a price for being well when you needed to be well I must return your sickness and suffering at twice the severity. You will live and you will recover but you will suffer for my healing you.”

Butterfly stared with confusion into Galla's eyes when she felt the pain returning as laser pistol injuries returned to her. The magically displaced injuries dissolved her flesh as they appeared and broke her bones.

Galla said. “It will take you a few hours to recover. Unimaginable pain such as yours does tend to create screaming so for the good of the other patents I will hack your soul to remove your ability to scream or groan.”

Galla touched Butterfly lightly on the head and walked out of the room.

Butterfly silently screamed as her body started to heal up from being tattered and bleeding parts of flesh, skin, organs and bones.

***

Lucy lay in the dark, crying out in pain and flexed her arms and legs as bone grew from the stumps and flesh grew over the bones. It was a long slow process and she could sense other minds in the room with her but they were very weak and in tremendous pain.

***

Nadine approached Galla with the sylph who had run with her on the battlefield. “Galla, this is Amy.”

Amy waved. She was short, had shoulder length ginger hair and wore track suit bottoms and a t-shirt.

“Amy ran with me out there. She's very good at running. Anyway her last mistress was killed by the military state over there for attempting to cause sedition and she hasn't really had a home since...” said Nadine carefully.

Galla laughed. “It's alright. I have Butterfly. You have Amy.”

Galla scratched under Amy's chin affectionately. “It would be a pleasure to have you, my dear, and I'm sure Butterfly would be glad of the company. Tell me what sort of ice cream do you like?”

“Mango sorbet.” said Amy with an innocent grin.

Nadine and Galla shared a hungry look brought on by the topic of sorbets.

Nadine asked tentatively. “Do you want one now?”

Amy said seriously. “Sorbets can wait until after we've treated the injured.”

“How right you are.” said Galla solemnly as she started treating the injured.

Amy asked. “Is sorbet some kind of code or something because I'm fairly certain I missed some subtext there?”

Nadine chuckled. “Don't worry, I'm sure you'll find out.”

“Oh.” said Amy then she and Nadine started seeing to the injured.

***

General Galbion had been quite badly shot up during the battle as had most of her troops but they'd held it together during the battle.

Now General Galbion lay on the kitchen floor as a fairy who had been coopted as a nurse used spells as anaesthetic and proceeded to perform surgery, stitching her wounds together.

Galbion was a wereshark of course so she would heal naturally but the lazer fire had cauterized the wounds preventing blood from pouring through and healing them. Besides which the orc's hardy body resisted the wereshark dna, stopping her from healing as fast. Stitching her organs back together ensured Galbion would be in less pain and recover sooner, something of vital import to a General.

For now though Galbion lay beside a Dwarf who wasn't fortunate enough to have wereshark dna.

Two nurses worked on the dwarf. One leaned over the Dwarf's open chest, preparing organs for removal as another ferried fresh replacement organs made from the Dwarf's dna to her and carried off the old junk organs.

The Dwarf was not in pain but was clearly quite distressed by the sight of so much fussing around her open chest.

Galbion said. “Hey.”

The Dwarf looked worried for a moment then saw Galbion and said. “Hey, you're that General aren't you?”

“Aye.” said Galbion lightly. “I helped defend us from harm. What's your name?”

“Diamonite Richloon Gold-Crusher” said the Dwarf. “You know I was a brigade leader back home?”

“No.” said Galbion. “Orcs don't have military ranks. We just have little orc, less small orc, orc, larger than normal orc, big orc, slightly bigger orc and huge orc. I would be regarded as barely a less small orc if I was lucky.”

Diamonte laughed. “Yeah that's how babby dwarfs would decide on a pecking order. We do have an official drafted army though. Mostly for appearance’s sake since we are the best weapon smiths and most races don't entirely trust that we're selling them our best weapons and not keeping all the super high quality stuff for ourselves. They call it the Dwarfish Taboo. The more time that goes by when we aren't attacked and can create weapons for ourselves the less advantageous it would be to try your luck with us.”

Diamonte laughed at what she was saying.

Galbion laughed. “We have something like that. The Orc-ish Invasion Period. An area orcs have invaded is only vulnerable for three weeks following the initial invasion as there after our numbers, hold on the town and connections with other orc strongholds make the area too well defended to attack with any real chance of success.”

Diamonte grinned at Galbion. “Exactly. I mean when worthy causes do seek our help we have to be very careful. Politically we have to make it clear that we no longer consider these dwarfs 'dwarfs' and shun them like but it's all a show. The opponents to our allies crap their pants knowing that the dwarfs are siding with the enemy while knowing attacking us dwarfs directly would be suicide and as a consequence when our 'exiles' win we become even more impregnable. What about you?”

Galbion thought for a second then said. “The odd well coordinated attack does wipe out an area we've invaded but only by drawing our forces elsewhere, cutting off the reinforcements and supply lines to the area then striking harder and faster. It's generally wiser to decapitate our leaders and intimidate us into obeying you. As has happened now funnily enough.”

Galbion and Diamonte laughed about that and Galbion observed that Diamonte's chest had been sewn closed and now the nurse who had been treating him was off seeing others. He asked. “So how's Rome?”

Diamonte grimaced. “You know the legends they tell of where the gods punish the very worst of sapient beings? Fire, brimstone, hot coals and torture devices?”

Galbion nodded. “I'm an orc, you just described my homeland.”

Diamonte shook her head slightly but severely. “No, this is not home. This is where the weak, the ugly, the impure and the disobedient are sent to be punished. They are made to work the machinery that tortures each other because if they disobey they get eaten alive. I know quite a few friends who willingly underwent such horror so their suffering might end.”

“Right.” said Galbion and she very calmly decided to overthrow this corrupt regime.

***

Amy was sewing up the wounds of an old woman with numbers tattooed along her arm.

“What's your name dear?” asked the old woman.

“Amy.” said Amy.

“That's a nice name.” said the old woman. “I'm Judith Heisenberg”

Amy smiled. “Well, Judith, we should have you on your feet in no time.”

Judith gave a bitter laugh. “You know I honestly didn’t think there could be anything more horrible than a nazi.”

Amy nodded. “I wouldn't have thought there could be either.”

Judith sighed. “The nazis were people at the end of the day. They were angry, they got annoyed or disgusted. Some of them even showed fear and distress at what they had to do, although not enough to stop. The ones in Rome though? They loved the pain and suffering. They greeted each tiny act of rebellion or weakness with a giddy smile and an anticipatory lick of their lips. They were cats waiting for permission to play with their mice.”

Judith shuddered.

Amy finished her work and pulled off the plastic gloves then squeezed Judith's hand. “Well you're here now, protected with lots of food and entertainment.”

Judith laughed a hearty laugh. “That my dear is very much true, and I didn't have to take that shower.”

Amy moved on to help another patient.

***

After 5 hours Lucy could wriggle her toes and flex her fingers. She performed careful stretches and pressure tests on her limbs. They'd do.

Lucy felt around herself. She was in an empty air tight box. The whine of a ventilation unit let her know why she could still breath.

Lucy braced against the side of the box with her arms and tried to push the box lid off with her legs. No good. She was trying to open the lid with her knees and shins. She turned onto her side and braced with her left arm and legs then tried again. No good. Lucy braced the back of the right hand against her right shoulder then threw all her weight at the lid. The seal broke and her right arm lunged upwards, pushing the lid up.

Lucy sat up in an instant, trusting her shoulders to better keep the lid open.

Lucy carefully tried to stand up but she and the inside of this box were covered in slimy gunk, too slippery to stand up. Lucy glanced over the edge and could barely make out some kind of floor a few feet below the box. This was going to be painful.

Lucy swung her right leg over the edge of the box. Then her right arm. Then she took a few deep breaths and barely managed to awkwardly skewer herself along the edge of the box.

Then it was pulled off the table it was resting on and clattered on top of Lucy.

The good news was Lucy was still free from the confines of the box and now on the floor. The bad news was that the fall and being squashed by the falling box had knocked her unconscious.

***

Butterfly stopped trying to scream, she was no longer in any pain and almost fully recovered. She tried to speak and found herself unable. She could breathe and eat but she could not vocalise a single sound.

She climbed out of bed, entered the hamster cage for a shower and some clothes then she stalked out of Galla's bedroom to find her.

Galla was treating an elf who had lost an eye when she felt someone touch her arm and looked up to see Butterfly.

Galla nodded her understanding then finished seeing to her patent.

Butterfly glared at Galla the entire time.

When Galla had finished she touched her hand to Butterfly's forehead.

Butterfly breathed. “You cunt.”

Galla glared at Butterfly.

Butterfly glared back. “You owe me.”

Galla shook her head. “I did what I had to do. You were needed.”

Butterfly hissed in Galla's ear. “I am your pet, not your toy soldier to send into battle then silence the screams of.”

Galla whispered. “I understand that you are angry now but I know you will come round in time, go see your new sister Amy.”

Butterfly looked over to where the Hooded Justice was chatting with a ginger woman. She groaneded. “I suppose I better, you might decide to remove my ability to think.”

Butterfly strolled over and introduced herself. “Nice to meet you, I am Sister Lucille Danse of the Sylph Liberation Front but my owners call me Butterfly.”

Amy hugged Butterfly. “You were amazing in the battle, I've heard such a lot about you.”

***

Lucy woke up and groaned with the pain and the memories of pain, she squirmed out from under the box, rolled onto her front and tried to stand up. It took a while but eventually Lucy stood up and nervously fumbled her way towards the wall and thence to the door.

Lucy steeped out into the bright hallway and blinked. She had no idea where she was.

As her eyes adjusted to the light Lucy walked along the hallway. At last she found a computer terminal, she used it to access the pa and sent a targeted signal to Galla's quantum oscillator.

***

Galla heard her quantum oscillator beeping, she pulled it out of her pocket and answered the signal.

“Hello, who is this?”

“Lucy.” came the voice from the quantum oscillator. “I'm right outside that place where you left me in a box to heal. On the one hand it worked, on the other hand I have no idea where I am, I'm covered in this strange goop and I'm completely naked. Oh and famished, tired and afraid.”

Galla ran.

***

Lucy slid down the hallway and started to pass out again. She closed her eyes for what seemed like a moment and when she opened them again, Galla was stood over her and had thrown her underwear, a t-shirt and track suit bottoms.

“These are a bit small.” said Lucy absently as she got dressed.

Galla said. “I'm terribly sorry for you but we aren't done yet.”

“No.” said Lucy mournfully.

Galla shook her head. “The question of Greta remains”

At the mention of her friends name any sign of tiredness, fear or submissiveness was replaced by military stoicism and determination. “Show me what happened to Greta”

Galla nodded. “Of course, follow me.”

Lucy finished getting dressed and followed Galla.

***

Amy was curled up on the floor as Butterfly stroked her.

Amy groaned. “You're amazing!”

Butterfly shrugged. “Sylphs always are”

Galla and Lucy entered.

Nadine said. “Oh, thank god. Lucy, you're alright.”

Butterfly looked to Lucy and understood. Quietly she said. “Nadine, take over.” Then she approached Lucy and Galla.

“Greta.” said Butterfly and Lucy as one when they got close.

Butterfly said. “I'll get the fairies to take Greta up to the shark tank entrance. I want you using holograms to build her new cybernetic limbs and ensure we have a safe way to operate on her and treat her.”

Galla and Lucy nodded then headed to Deck 3.

Butterfly headed into the kitchen and spoke to Lily. “We're seeing to Greta at the entrance to the shark tank. We could use your help.”

Lily nodded and headed to Deck 3.

***

Greta awoke to the face of Butterfly. There was a tube blowing water through her gills, she could breath but she was restricted by machinery, unable to move.

“It's okay.” said Lucy gently. “We're trying to help you.”

Lily said. “We just need to apply some healing lotion to your wounds and sew you back together. Then we'll loose a knock out drug into the airflow while you recover so you'll wake up fully healed and able to swim with Butterfly.”

Greta sniffed. “Why won't you swim with me? You are the Mother of the Blood, are you not?”

Lily giggled. “I'm a werewolf again. Butterfly will swim with you.”

Butterfly coughed. “Well actually it's been a long day so Lily may be swimming with you in spirit.”

“Awesome.” said Greta cheerfully. “One last swim before you go off to rebuild the werewolf empire.”

Lily laughed.

“And what's this I smell? Galla?” said Greta curiously.

Galla laughe.d “Butterfly's right it's been a long day so I'm here to look after my babies and whisk them off to the land of nod when there's time.”

Lucy shrugged. “Yeah I have some stories to tell you, old friend. Now hold steady as we work.”

***

In a darkened room 4 creatures in 4 sterile boxes screamed their first breaths and passed out.

***

Greta woke up, recovered from the surgery and knocked out healing time.

Lucy said. “Enjoy your swim.”

The filter providing Greta with air to breath vanished then the floor of the operation tank tilted out from under Greta, providing a slide into the shark tank.

Butterfly was waiting in the tank for Greta. They swam together about half an hour then Lily possessed Lucy and the two old sharks swam together that night.

Lucy meanwhile was taken into the dining hall with Amy and treated to a banquet with her choice of sorbet before Galla and Nadine stroked her into a blissful sleep.

***

The next day Lucy woke up naked next to Amy and asked. “Did we?”

Amy laughed. “I'm straight, you're fine.”

Lucy said. “Awesome. Now what do you say we each have a shower and get dressed?”

Amy nodded. “Do you know where the showers are?”

Lucy grinned. “Follow me.”

***

Butterfly breached out of the water and landed on the pier over the shark tank, she turned to human form and watched Greta.

Greta exploded out of the water and landed neatly in the cyber cradle. It caught Greta easily and attached her artificial limbs, oxygen rebreather and translation circuits. Greta strode out of the cradle and said. “Thanks again.”

Butterfly shrugged. “You're my best mate from a parallel world. Kind of had to help you.”

Greta nodded. “Now, clothes.”

Butterfly sighed. “The perennial problem. After you.”

***

Lucy picked out clothes for Amy on the pretence of finding clothes that fit her. When she was happy with how Amy looked she exited the hamster cage with Amy in tow.

Butterfly and Greta were standing naked before Lucy and Amy.

Lucy swallowed.

Amy chuckled. “Well this is awkward.”

Lucy said. “Please turn her to stone.”

Amy was a bit taken aback.

Butterfly growled. “Can it wait until after I've gotten dressed?”

Lucy took a good long look at Butterfly. “I suppose so...”

Butterfly and Greta entered the hamster cage.

Amy asked. “Why do you want to turn me to stone?”

Lucy ruffled Amy's hair. “Because you're a brand new puppy. You should be petrified and thawed

out when your owners have time for you.”

Amy stuck her tongue. “Meanie.”

Lucy rolled her eyes and headed towards the kitchen for breakfast.

***

Nadine and Galla woke up in the holodeck. They hurriedly showered and got dressed then headed down to the kitchen for breakfast.

***

Everyone united round the kitchen table when they were dressed. Even Galbion and Butterfly's Lieutenants.

Butterfly said. “We should probably work on reviving the plasticlones today-”

“Plastic-what?” asked Galbion. “I thought they were robots.”

Butterfly nodded. “Robots with human souls. I and the Farsh-nuke met them when we gave the Unleasher to the Bam-Kursh.”

Lucy chilled. “You've met the Bam-Kursh?”

Butterfly nodded. “It was my Farsh-nuke's first meeting with him, yet also the Bam-Kursh's last meeting with him. Apparently the Bam-Kursh had reformed and only wanted to live in peace with the Farsh-nuke so the Farsh-nuke gave the Bam-Kursh his future self who had somehow changed gender and was calling herself the Unleasher.”

“Huh.” said Lucy curiously. “Why does that seem familiar to me?”

“So these plastic phones-” began Galbion.

“Plasticlones.” corrected Butterfly.

“Yeah, them. You want us to bring them all back to life and repair them so they can shoot at us again, is that right?” asked Galbion.

Butterfly opened her mouth to say something when Galla raised a hand.

Galla swallowed down the last of her bacon and said. “What my cuddly little Butterfly means to say is that the plasticlones are an asset just like Lucy, Greta, the fairies and you. We could just play safe and murder everyone in cold blood or we could keep them alive and use them.”

Galbion heard the threat very clearly and pulled her plasma rifle on Galla.

The silence was so great you could hear people's hearts beating.

Galla's eyes glowed green and she sent the following message into Galbion's head. “Think very carefully about what you are doing. Even if you kill me, which is a very big if, then the Hooded Justice and Butterfly will murder you. Lucy and Greta will attack you as well. Lots of people to call

the alarm.”

Galbion swallowed and laid her gun on the table. “I thought you were better than orcs” She said and left the kitchen table.

“Blimey.” said Nadine to lighten the mood. “She's raring for an early grave.”

“Early grave.” said Lucy. The words struck a chord for some reason. “Alone in a coffin, unable to see, unable to seek help with only the groans of the dead for company.”

Lucy remembered being in the sterile slimy tank. She remembered the feeling of pain and agony that was so like hers yet not hers and then she remembered Butterfly's half-heard words to the nurse. 'Lay Lucy down in a vat in a sterile room. Do it for her limbs as well. She can heal.'

Lucy felt where her arms and legs had ended in stumps after her part of the battle. “Do it for her limbs as well.” She muttered. “She can heal.”

Lucy ran from the table.

***

Lucy found the computer panel she had used and the room she must have exited from. She pushed it open and turned on the lights.

There were 5 sterile boxes, the centre one lay upturned and empty on the floor, the gunk that was inside spilled out slightly. With the light on Lucy could see the boxes were clearly labelled. From left to right they read:
Right Hand
Right Leg
Head and Torso
Left Leg
Left Hand

Except there wasn't just one limb in each box, there was an entire, naked, sleeping Lucy.

Lucy broke down crying.

***

As Butterfly and the fairies worked on reviving the plasticlones, Galla, Greta and Nadine would use their quantum oscillators to try and fix them.

Nadine asked at one point/ “What are we going to do with all these plasticlones?”

Greta shrugged. “What are you going to do about your asylum seekers? Seems to me like your grand mission would put civilians in harms way. Plus what if more asylum seekers arrive after we've gone? Are you really telling me you'd let people die just because they missed the bus?”

Nadine swallowed and went about her work.

***

Galbion found Diamonte talking to Judith.

Diamonte threw out her arms in welcome. “Galbion! How goes the day, General?”

“Yes.” said Judith cheerfully. “I have heard rather a lot about you. Our great military leader.”

Galbion smiled. “Yes, about that. I've been thinking, one way or another someone needs to stay behind and provide asylum for those who need it. Supplies and protection, that sort of thing.”

“Yes, Galbion, exactly, Judith's just been telling me about something they called- Oh what was it?”

“The Resistance.” said Judith. “And The Underground Rail Road.”

Diamonte nodded excitedly. “All we need are troops.”

“I can get you troops.” said Galbion carefully. “I can get you weresharks, fairies and plasticlones. Maybe even a sylph.”

“Fantastic.” said Judith. “Just the woman we need.”

***

Lucy stopped crying and stared at the women in the sterile boxes again. She pulled out her quantum oscillator and started recording video as she explained what happened and showed off the evidence before her.

***

Amy sat beside Galla as she worked and whined. “Why won't you cuddle me?”

Galla tried to pet Amy enough that her consciousness would fall beneath the subconscious bliss and therefore Amy would shut up and go to sleep.

Galla's attempt failed because Amy was really really excited about being Galla's pet and excited sylphs are kittens that play with wool, not kittens that fall asleep on wool.

After half an hour Galla led Amy towards Butterfly and whispered. “Turn her to stone while I do this work please.”

Butterfly sighed and took time out of reviving people from being turned to stone to turn her new sister to stone.

Galla went back to work.

As they entered the hamster cage Amy said. “Galla promised you would give me a lovely surprise.”

Thinking fast Butterfly said. “It's a photoshoot, you're going to be a model.”

Butterfly studied how Amy was dressed and could see the look Lucy was going for then guessed where Lucy would want the statue. Right in the centre of the very bland hamster cage.

Butterfly pretended to take photos with her quantum oscillator and did the air kissing sleazy

photographers were supposed to do. “And now pretend you're flying with Peter Pan.”

With perfect poise and balance Amy kicked out her left leg and stretched out her arms, Kaftan billowing like wings in the air. Butterfly blew fairy dust in her face and she turned to stone.

Then Butterfly's quantum oscillator beeped. New message. Butterfly projected the message on the white floor and watched as Lucy explained how there were now five of her, the original and her ‘cuttings’.

***

Butterfly opened the door to the sterile room and entered. Butterfly hugged Lucy and wiped her eyes. “Honey, see that collar around your neck? That's proof that you are the real you. Your destiny is still yours.”

Lucy stared at Butterfly. “And what about the other mes? What do they do? They didn't ask for this. They think they're me and now I'm going to have to say 'Sorry, ladies, you are a mistake caused by me fucking up on the battlefield. Now go away and live your own lives'.”

Butterfly stared at Lucy. “Go find Greta, show her the video and let the others know. I'll keep watch.”

Lucy nodded. “That's sense Butterfly, I knew I could trust you.”

Lucy left the room.

Butterfly opened the box that had contained Lucy's left leg and stroked the sleeping form there in.

The cutting of Lucy woke up. “Butterfly, what are you doing here and why am I in so much pain?”

Butterfly said. “When I saved Lucy's body, I collected up her body parts assuming they would be allowed to reconnect with Lucy. I was wrong. Now, come on, let me show you.”

Butterfly helped the cutting out of her box and walked her to the wall where they could turn and study the scene.

Lucy's cutting said. “I'm her left leg, aren't I?”

Butterfly nodded. “The real Lucy explained what happened in a video if you need to see it but I was wondering, since you're without an owner and a destiny whether, well...”

The cutting hugged Butterfly and whispered. “If only until I find some higher purpose, that seems like a good plan.”

Butterfly and the left leg cutting strode out of the room together.

***

Galbion entered the room and headed towards the box containing the right hand cutting. She opened the box and softly said. “Wakey, wakey, soldier.”

The Lucy cutting woke up. “Galbion? What?”

“I'll explain once you're out.” said Galbion as she helped the Lucy cutting out of the box.

They walked to the wall and studied the scene as Galbion explained. “I've been thinking, it might be time for us to go our separate ways. Me and everybody else on this bus. I've been talking with some of the asylum seekers and wondering about setting up an underground rail road and we could use your skills.”

The cutting snorted. “So I'd be your right hand woman?”

“Not exactly planning a war to save the multiverse I know but you would make a damn sight more of a difference with us than you would being brought off as somebody's pet.” said Galbion seriously.

The cutting nodded. “If I do this though I get to pick who my actual owner is and lily comes with us. She's a damn fine medic and battle tactician, plus I don't trust her with Butterfly.”

***

Once Lucy had finished explaining the situation to Greta, Galla and Nadine. Butterfly entered the meeting room with Lucy's left leg cutting at the end of a leash.

Lucy glared at Butterfly.

Butterfly said. “She's a consenting adult. It's not your place to say what your cuttings can and can't do. Besides, you're only jealous because you've got this epic destiny bullshit on your shoulders while your cutting here gets to do what sylphs should do. Watch lots of TV and Movies and get lots of hugs and strokes.”

Lucy rolled her eyes.

Greta patted Lucy on the back consolingly.

“Why her left leg?” asked Galla.

Butterfly shrugged. “I always thought Lucy had a very pretty left leg.”

Lucy blushed.

Lucy's cutting also blushed.

Nadine asked. “Okay what are we going to do?”

“My thoughts exactly.” said Galbion as she introduced her right hand woman dressed in a world war 2 US military uniform.

Greta's jaw dropped. “You really picked that cutting just for the pun, didn't you?”

Galbion blushed.

Galbion's right hand woman blushed. “Never mind about which cuttings are affiliated with which people. There is a tyrannical empire there, not unlike the one Butterfly took down and Lucy's people

overthrew and hope to destroy. Now we need to rush in there to wipe out the empire and restore everyone to their proper places and times but we must also ensure that anyone who does escape can find refuge."

Butterfly asked. "A lot has happened in these nine days so when you say restored to our proper times and places?"

Galla smiled. "I'm not going to undo anything if that's what you think and I'm certainly not about to undo the creation of such super teams."

"Anyway." said Nadine as she clapped her hands decisively. "How do you hope to achieve this?"

Galbion said. "I have veterans of setting up underground rail roads and distinguished leaders in the art of war to aid in the planning. I will take a few orcs loyal to me and a few fairies who agree with my plan. Lily and the wereshark civilians will also join me. With about 30 or 50 robots we should be able to defend this area against a small army. If we can defend it then in time our numbers will grow from the captured and reprogrammed robots and all the asylum seekers who will come for our aid."

Butterfly stared at Galbion thoughtfully. "You saw how it was yesterday, even with this battleship people had no beds and there was risk of infection? Plus you'd need extensive sanitary facilities, a great food hall and loads of places for people to sleep?"

Galbion and her right hand woman stared blankly back at Butterfly.

"And should we need the cavalry, you'd technically be within our ship." concluded Butterfly.

Galla laughed.

Nadine stared in disbelief at Butterfly.

Galbion grinned, her right hand woman looked smug.

Gretta snorted.

Lucy said. "Surely it isn't possible?"

Butterfly grinned "Oh, it's possible. I mean it will take a while, even with six of me but it's very definitely possible. Just got to reconfigure the architecture of the ship and have two doors at any one time. The one you guys have and the one we have."

Butterfly's cutting said. "I have an idea."

"Oh, yes?" asked Galla.

Butterfly's cutting suggested. "What if we woke up left hand and right leg, explained the situation to them, had them help rearrange the architecture of the ship with the rest of us while you non-Lucy's arranged precisely who would stay to help the underground rail road and who would help overtake the city then once the job is done we have left hand and right leg pose, become statues and thaw them when we come across someone who we genuinely think could give them a good home?"

Nadine stared at Butterfly's cutting. "You can't be serious surely, I mean that's highly unethical.

Turning someone to stone just because you can't be arsed dealing with them at the moment. It's despicable.”

There was an awkward silence as Galla leaned over and explained what had happened to Amy.

“I give up!” cried Nadine incredulously “You're all mad!”

Greta chuckled. “She's only just realised that.”

“Now...” said Galla as she studied the room. “I believe I owe people hugs.”

“We're going to wake up inside the ship architecture reconfigurator aren't we?” asked Lucy dryly.

“Yep.” said Butterfly cheerfully.

***

While everybody else was busy Lily meditated and possessed a fairy.

She flew the fairy inside Galla's room and the hamster cage then marvelled at the statue.

Lily blew fairy dust at the statue and cut off Amy's little finger on her left hand.

The fairy then found the statue of Flitzy Honeytoast and blew fairy dust on it. she brought the statue to life.

The fairy then flew into the room where Lily was meditating and flew into Lily's trouser pocket.

Lily's trouser pocket was bigger on the inside and inside there lay a small unregarded black box.

The fairy touched the box and found herself within a completely sterile almost pitch black room.

The fairy flew past dozens of clear perspex boxes filled with agar jelly and blood and dropped the finger inside a box with the label Amy.

***

Amy played with Flitzy for a bit but then she moped about how her new owners wouldn't see her so Flitzy wiped her memory.

Amy asked. “Butterfly, why do you look so different?”

Flitzy said. “Because I am allowing you to see my fairy form. Now, pose.”

With perfect poise and balance Amy kicked out her left leg and stretched out her arms as her Kaftan billowed like wings in the air.

Flitzy blew dust in Amy's face and turned her to stone then she went back to her usual spot and turned herself to stone.

***

The Lucys woke inside the ship architecture re-configurator. Their minds were linked and saw a great white void through which they felt the thoughts of each other, like echoes their minds seemed the exact same but very subtly different. Lucy had chosen destiny. Butterfly had chosen family. Left Leg chose submissiveness. Right Hand chose defiance. Left Hand chose to mimic the others. Right Leg chose to obey.

Something was off though. Someone was silent and trying very hard not to think but their mind was a palpable void. A silence that overcame the intercom, a shadow across a sun. The Lucys focused on it together.

The Elder God laughed. “Did you forget that the Logicios are obsessed with the number seven? You are my babies and I will guide you toward your goals. Now, focus!”

Butterfly pictured how the doors work. One door there. My door, here, then a third door, a hidden door at my command.

Lucy pictured the hospital. State of the art equipment, vat grown organs, dna lab, surgeries, beds, IV drips, life sign monitors, holographic doctors.

Left Leg pictured the bedrooms. It was what she wanted for herself. A computer, a hamster cage, a mirror, a wardrobe, a chest of draws, a large double bed.

Right Hand pictured the armoury. A variety of gear for all creatures and mounts.

Left Hand pictured the kitchen as it was in the ship.

Right Leg pictured what they had all just pictured.

The Elder God focused in on the details. She made the information more and more specific each cycle until after 5 hours the dreaming ended and they were back in their own heads.

***

Butterfly blinked in the cold light of day as the reconfigurator screen lifted up, letting her out.

Galla appeared before Butterfly and helped her out of the cramped pod. They walked to the next pod over and extracted Left Leg, Right Hand and the rest.

They walked towards the console room and discussed their plans.

“You should meet my owner.” said Lucy to Butterfly. “She'd love to meet you and could give you some amazing advice for looking after your cutting.”

Butterfly laughed. “Well I'd like a date before you show me to your owner.”

Right Hand said to Left Leg. “You should look up advanced tricks for Sylphs. I think it mentions somewhere about a meditative trance that will let you hear your owner's thoughts. It'll help her no end.”

Left Leg said to Right Hand. “When you're off saving people, remember that you need downtime too. Don't push yourself too hard.”

Left Hand said. “I think I want to be a regal statue, almost Greek. You know, evoke purity and wisdom?”

Right Leg nodded. “I could do that, I just hope a handsome hero chooses me.”

Galla beamed, proud of the Lucys.

***

In the console room Galbion, Diamonte and Judith waited.

Right Hand strode forward and waved goodbye.

“We'll take good care of her.” said Judith.

Lucy and Galla nodded then watched them ride out.

Lily walked out after them.

“I have decided where I want you.” said Galla as she gestured to two spots either side of the door to her room.

Left Hand stood to the left of the door and - following Galla's instructions- held aloft a quantum oscillator as one part of an archway.

Right Leg stood to the right of the door, right foot forward and held aloft a plasma rifle to complete the archway.

“Sweet dreams.” said Butterfly and she blew fairy dust at each of them, turning them to stone.

Galla asked Butterfly if she could run inside and fetch Amy.

Butterfly and her pet entered Galla's room and the hamster cage.

Butterfly revived Amy and, at her request, turned Left Leg to stone.

When Butterfly returned with Amy, Galla led her three sylphs off in search of Nadine and a nice family meal.

***

The bus drove off towards Rome once more but this time they left behind a camp behind for seekers of asylum.

Chapter 13
A Spot Of Diplomacy

Butterfly was in the hamster cage braiding the hair of her cutting of Lucy.

The cutting asked “What are you going to call me?”

Butterfly laughed. “Lucy, silly, that's your name.”

Butterfly's pet said. “Yeah but I'm not Lucy any more, am I? Lucy is going to be off saving the multiverse while I'll be the sylph snuggling up with you while you watch Marvel films. I'm the pet, she's the hero. You need to pick a name for me.”

Butterfly thought for a second then said. “Kitty.”

Kitty laughed. “Okay, I like it. It's cute.”

Butterfly stopped braiding Kitty's hair and hugged her. “Like you.”

Kitty squealed. “I grew from the severed left leg of a version of you from a parallel universe, we look exactly the same.”

Butterfly shook her head. “Still cuter.”

Kitty nuzzled up to Butterfly.

Butterfly pulled what looked like a black ping pong ball from her pocket and held it before Kitty.

“What's that?” asked Kitty.

“Bigger on the inside, like this ship. I formatted the inside to be like this hamster cage complex. This is where I'm going to keep you when things get rough or dangerous.” said Butterfly.

Kitty stared at her. “But you're a pet too, shouldn't you be in your own pod?”

Butterfly shook her head. “The thing inside Galla, it chose me as her champion. I need to fight. You however can be safe.”

“Okay...” said Kitty warily. “If that's what you want?”

Butterfly nodded and then the pulled out a futuristic fusion between a gun and a syringe.

Kitty swallowed. “You want to microchip me?”

Butterfly dismantled the gun syringe and checked everything was working as she explained. “I don't want to make you like me. You're better off as just a sylph but neither do I want to leave you defenseless. This gem will let you perform fairy magic and become a wolf or a shark if you need to but it won't make you a fairy or a wereshark. I can use blood control to find you but you can't be possessed or go mad with rage and hunger. You will also be able to call your pod and Flitzy to you and turn her to stone or revive her on demand.”

Kitty nodded. “And it will let you track me down from the other side of the multiverse?”

Butterfly grinned as she reassembled the gun. “Yes, it will let me track you down from the other side of the multiverse. Ha. See I'm a sylph myself, I know what mischievous little imps can get up to. Now give me your left hand.”

Kitty laughed and laid her left hand on Butterfly's lap.

Butterfly fired the gem into the palm of Kitty's hand.

Kitty cried out in pain and Butterfly hugged her. “Hush. Hush. It's all right.”

***

Nadine and Galla were eating breakfast in the dining hall.

Galla watched Nadine eating and felt proud.

“What did I do to deserve you?” asked Galla absently.

Nadine paused, black pudding and bacon halfway to her lips. She set down the morsel and used a napkin to wipe her face. “You saved my life, remember?”

Galla shook her head. “That wasn't me, that was Butterfly.”

Nadine chuckled, left hand casually reaching into her coat pocket. “Ah yes, I forgot about that but no, I mean you.” Nadine reached her right hand across the table and grabbed Galla's left hand by the wrist. “You saved me. I was unlucky. They had my best friend hostage. I was trapped. I was trapped and I had no idea what I was going to do. I was just about ready to fall on my sword and become a martyr. This trick or trap you pulled? The one that let us meet? It saved my life. I was a fraction of a second from feeling the bullet that would end my life.”

Galla's jaw dropped.

Nadine's left hand came up from her pocket to place a small velvet box before Galla. “You saved my life, Galla, and these past few days – as weird as they have been – have been the best of my life.”

Galla swallowed and stammered. She took a deep breath then said “But we've only known each other days?”

“Open it.” said Nadine.

Galla opened the box and pulled out a brass ring with an emerald set into it and a locket. Inside the locket was a mechanical clock with a single button.

Galla stared, completely surprised.

Nadine stared at her hands shyly and chuckled as she explained. “Obviously it's not like this has extreme sentimental value or anything. I came here with just the clothes on my back. I had to make these using the hologram suite and your matter generators.”

“They're lovely.” said Galla as she took Nadine's hand.

Nadine smiled. “The ring is a promise. The locket is a timer. If you accept what I have to say then push the button and start the timer. You see I know now that I want to spend the rest of my life with you but I don't want to rush the paper work for a decision like this so in four years the alarm will trill and that promise ring will have to be upgraded to an engagement ring.”

Galla looked at the timer. Then at Nadine. Then at the timer. She pressed the button, pulled on the

ring, reached across the table and kissed Nadine. She pulled back and gazed meaningfully into Nadine's eyes as she clambered up onto the table.

Nadine gazed back and answered. “Gosh, I love you.” Then she kissed Galla back.

The kiss became a snog and they tore at each other's clothes.

***

Lucy and Amy woke up naked in Galla's bedroom.

Amy looked worriedly at Lucy. “We didn't- did we?”

Lucy laughed. “I thought you were straight?”

Amy fell silent and blushed.

“Relax.” said Lucy gently. “We were clearly just blissed out from the petting last night. It would explain why we are lying on the floor and not the bed. Besides I have it on good authority that many apparently straight men have exceptions and most of their exceptions aren't a patch on the average sylph, let alone a Paragon of Virtue that the Great Farsh-nuke himself turned.”

Amy laughed. “You're right.” She got up off the floor and stood nude before Lucy.

Lucy licked her lips, bit her lip then asked. “How curious are you?”

Amy bent double laughing then realized Lucy wasn't laughing. “You're not serious, are you?”

Lucy thought for a moment then said. “You are very pretty and very endearing. The offer's there, if you want it.”

Amy put her hands on her hips and said. “Well I wouldn't know where to begin.”

Lucy barked. “Ha!” Then she said more sincerely. “I could show you.”

Amy bit her lip.

Lucy got to her feet and stood before Amy. “Well, if you're not sure, I'm probably going to have a shower then go get dressed. I'm game if you are, but only if you are.”

Amy stared at Lucy and licked her lips. “No one can know.”

Lucy saluted. “Scout’s honour.”

A smile spread slowly across Amy's face.

***

Olaf Gamalzes was the orc in charge of driving the bus and so was the only person to notice the small heavily armed army guarding the entrance to Rome. She stopped the bus and went inside the ship.

Olaf found Nadine and Galla getting dressed and said. “Excuse me but Rome is a bit more heavily defended than we were expecting.”

Nadine nodded. “Makes sense doesn't it? It's the most heavily fortified area, so any strangers finding themselves here would congregate there for security. Olaf, you'll have to be our general. Galla, fetch Lucy and Butterfly, we need the fairies and someone to lead the Plasticlones.”

Galla nodded and ran out of the dining room as she got dressed.

“And what'll you be doing, Sir?” asked Olaf.

Nadine said. “I think the Hooded Justice may be needed and it might help our case if we have someone skilled at public speaking to help us.”

***

Galla caught Lucy and Amy in the act but stood and silently watched until each cried out in ecstasy.

Then Galla clapped and whooped.

Amy blushed and covered herself.

Lucy laughed.

Amy and Lucy each got to their feet.

Amy cried. “What were you doing there, you pervert!?”

Galla studied Amy carefully. “It's not my business what you get up to in your down time but there's an army outside and we need a general for our plasticlones. If it makes you feel any better, Amy, I've also been fucking my girlfriend and I have seen you two naked enough times to not need to see you fucking to know what it would look like.”

Amy blushed and hid behind Lucy.

Lucy said. “Leave her alone, it was her first time with a woman.”

“Indeed.” said Galla as she raised an eyebrow. “Then might I expect to hand Amy over to the other me so you can continue your relationship?”

Lucy rolled her eyes. “It was just a fuck.”

Galla nodded. “I believe you. Anyway we need you showered, dressed and ready to lead an army. Think you can do that?”

Lucy nodded. “And if I see Butterfly on the way I'll let her know”

Galla left the doorway and Lucy slammed it shut behind her.

Amy said. “I don't suppose there's any point trying to pretend this didn't happen then?”

Lucy agreed. “Probably not.”

Amy asked. “Can we?”

Lucy laughed. “With the enemy at the gates?”

Amy blushed. “It was just so good”

Lucy grinned. “Well, in that case, why don't you shower and get dressed with me? Then we can see what happens after we've dealt with the army.”

Amy grinned.

***

Galla found Butterfly in the hologram suite. She was sat cross legged at the centre of a web of symbols made in blood.

“Are you surprised?” asked Butterfly without looking up or opening her eyes.

“Surprised that you're trying to control the blood or that you appear to have latent telepathy while controlling the blood?” asked Galla.

A hologram of Butterfly appeared and hovered towards Galla. “The Logicios use sylphs as biological components in their ships. They uplift them using concentrated blasts of logic until the sylphs are as eldritch as you then they install them in special chambers designed to harness their power to control, grow and maintain machinery and energy. For the holosuites though one uplifted sylph isn't enough. They raise girls to be the brightest and the best, give them the best knowledge until they have amazingly detailed imaginations, then they mutate them, turning their bodies into biological cables and slaving their minds to the host ship controls and plumb them into machinery to exploit their nurtured imaginations. It's the only way to let stupid computers have the imagination to make the dullard Logicio ideas detailed enough to represent in computers. One pleasant upshot of this is that I can possess and control the hologram generation through the blood. I have barely begun to explore the power I can wield.”

Galla nodded. “Yes, this is why I chose you. You are so innovative, clever and powerful yet so submissive to the right person.”

A tear rolled down the right cheek of the hologram of Butterfly. “Is that really all I am to you? A tool? A weapon to wield?”

Galla shrugged. “Galla cares a great deal for you but she wasn't born in a world where thinking beings were pets. She loves you but she is confused. As for me? I chose you. I was inside every woman in every universe for countless generations and I chose you. Whether I love you or not doesn't matter because by all normal measures of love I would pass. I just care about you for pragmatic reasons.”

The hologram of Butterfly held her hand aloft. “I appreciate your honesty.”

The hologram of Butterfly's hand started squeezing at the air.

Galla could feel her hearts contracting. “Butterfly, if you kill her I will only move to you.”

Another tear rolled down the cheek of the hologram of Butterfly.

Galla gasped and leaned on the console for support. She rasped. “Except that's what you want, isn't it? To martyr yourself. To die thinking your love was of benefit to Galla. You really must be a fool if you thinking Galla would appreciate your death.”

“I know what it is to have another mind controlling your body.” said the hologram of Butterfly coldly as she blinked away another tear.

Finally Galla gasped. “She needs you! Rome! Outside! Big army! Need fairies!”

Galla collapsed and the hologram vanished.

Galla lay panting on the floor. “Thank you.”

Butterfly got to her feet. “I didn't do it for you. I need to protect the sylphs.”

“Fair enough.” said Galla as Butterfly stepped over her body.

***

The President sat alone in the bar and drank from a tumbler.

The Hooded Justice saluted. “Sir, I thought you didn't drink alone.”

The President laughed. “It's a non-alcoholic cocktail, batman.”

The Hooded Justice sat down before the President. “Sir?”

“Oh.” said the President with a smirk. “I thought you were somebody else, somebody I used to know.”

“Understood.” said the Hooded Justice.

The President held his drink up to the light and swirled it gently as he stared through it at the Hooded Justice. “So-” He knocked back the drink. “I take it you didn't come find me for the conversation.”

The Hooded Justice nodded. “We need to enter Rome so we can put an end to this mess and there are some... People... Barring us access. I thought having an honest to goodness politician would do us some good. If you've got the charisma to become President then you've got the charisma to get us into Rome without a fight. That is, if anyone does.”

The President nodded. “A chance to end things amicably is always worth taking, no matter the risks. I'll do my best.”

***

Olaf and the orcs stepped out of the bus first followed by Lucy, Amy and the Plasticlone troopers. Then Butterfly and the fairies brang up the rear.

Galla, the President and the Hooded Justice left the bus last.

Rome's army watched impassively.

“Who is your leader!?” Demanded the President.

An extravagantly dressed sapient Tyrannosaurus Rex stepped out, plasma pistols and ammunition worn on her waistcoat. “I am the motherfucking Trex, bitches!”

The President nodded, unfazed. “Mrs Trex, I am the President of the United Sexes of America, I present you with my party and friends. Let us through peacefully and we will have no trouble with you.”

The Trex nodded. “All right, you three come up here and we can agree on peace terms.”

The Hooded Justice grinned. “Told you so”

The President laughed.

Galla followed them to the front.

“Mr President.” said the Trex. “Such an honour to eat you.”

As Galla and the Hooded Justice shared an odd look, the Trex shot the president in the chest then bit off his head with one bite.

Amy screamed.

The Trex cried. “Seize her!”

“What the fuck!?” cried the Hooded Justice.

Dinosaur Troopers ran out to take Amy.

“It will be all right.” said Lucy earnestly. She lied in the knowledge that any attempt at rescue would only doom them all.

The Trex said. “The good lord demands that I provide him with gladiators for his entertainment but a screamer won't last 5 minutes so I can claim her as my tithe.”

The Hooded Justice stared at him.

“Don't worry I prefer my prey scared and alive.” said the Trex genially. “Send the leaders to the Colosseum, in chains. The grunts can be separated and retrained you have my permission to eat or molest any that refuse to obey their new masters.”

Chapter 14
The Colosseum

Lucy woke up with only a vague idea of why she was where was but at least this time she wore clothes. Then she heard the cheering and the clapping. She opened her eyes to find herself lying on sand in the middle of Rome's famous colosseum. She got to her feet and assessed the stands, women

of many different species were cheering and a great green eye projected from a hovering bug in the centre of the colosseum watched over events.

Whump!

Lucy felt a great stabbing pain in her left side then realised it was a literal stabbing pain as her attacker heel palmed her forehead and a hidden blade impaled her in her left eye.

In the second or two before her shock wore off and the pain kicked in Lucy bought her knee up into her attacker's chest, elbowed her in the back of the neck, picked her up, threw her, stamped on her hands and started running.

Then the pain hit.

“Son of a bitch!” Lucy covered her left eye warily and circled her attacker warily. “What the fuck was that about!?”

Lucy's attacker wore a very custom spec outfit designed to help with climbing, running and taking on an army with stealth and surprise. It looked like a costume with overtones of badass suit and the renaissance.

Her attacker said. “His Royal Highness, Flavia Galla, The Bam-Kursh has decreed that we must fight to the death for his enjoyment. The victor gets 10 years imprisonment and rehabilitation. The loser is fed to those in the pit.”

Lucy nodded, understanding. “Who are you?”

Her attacker laughed. “You want me to tell you with his lord high overlord watching?”

Lucy shrugged and pulled her hand away for a nervous blink. “In my experience Big Brother has already made you his plaything or he can't fucking touch you. Either way it don't matter. What's your name?”

Her attacker nodded, understanding. “You make a surprising amount of sense for a sylph who'll be dead in a moment. Emilia Auditorie of the Sylph Allied Liberation Front at your service.”

Lucy blinked again. “Neat. So you're just toying with me to get information right? And you're going to kill me?”

Emilia nodded. “I'm a Salfy, I have to give you a chance it's only right. As is the need to extract information. A corpse tells no tales. Sorry about killing you by the way, it's like Peta putting down weak and injured animals. I only do it because I care.”

Lucy blinked and flexed, perfectly healed. “Well Emilia, I am First Officer Lucy Danse of the UCMS Paragon. I am the heir to the first Great Farsh-nuke and I am the woman expected to lead a war for the sake of all the multiverse-”

Lucy dashed forward and grabbed Emilia's sword and tugged. She ignoring Emilia's attempts to impale her as she ran back to the opposite end of the colosseum and raised the sword defensively. “And now that we are at an even chance, why don't you let me know what you can do?”

Emilia cried. “You're the woman who inspired the SALF! You're the woman destined to save us

from the Septagonoids and Logicios! I can't kill you! It'd kill everything my movement is about!”

Lucy gave the sword a few practice swings. “My life a lot less important than you think and to that end I am willing to let you win this fight if you can prove to me that you are worth more than I am.”

Emilia shook her head. “I'll fall on my sword, I can't kill you.”

“No. You can't.” said Lucy as she stared into Emilia's eyes. “You can liquefy my brain though and that should be enough for my purposes. Justify yourself.”

Emilia swallowed. “Justify myself? You really want this?” Emilia charged forward and stabbed Lucy in the heart as she whispered. “I hunt Logicios.”

Lucy laughed, the wound already healing. “I hunt pure logic and we are dealing with things that make Logicios look like sylphs.”

Shunk!

A small blade embedded itself in Lucy's jugular vein, tearing it open.

Lucy pulled out the blade and tossed it away harmlessly as her jugular vein scabbed over. “You'll have to do better than that.”

Emilia fired a pistol and Lucy's left leg was blown out from under her. As Lucy fell Emilia stabbed her in the chest and snapped her neck. “Well I have taken down the occasional Farsh-nuke.”

Lucy picked up the remains of her left leg and handed it to Emilia. “Put it in a jar of Agar Jelly and my blood. You have my permission to keep the resulting clone of me as your pet.”

Emilia rolled her eyes and stamped down on Lucy's chest, cracking her ribs. “You really don't die easily, do you?”

Lucy laughed. “Shut up and I'll tell you how.”

Emilio groaned and reclaimed her sword. “Fine. Tell me, how do I leave this arena alive?”

“Wide beam burst from that gun of yours up my nostril and obey the woman who looks like me but has wings.”

Emilio laughed. “As you wish. Now please, stay dead.”

Emilio bent down and fired a wide beam burst from her pistol up Lucy's left nostril. The top of Lucy's head and the entirety of her brain was vaporised.

The great green eye of the Bam-Kursh stared at her and announced. “You win. Proceed through the newly opened door.”

***

The Hooded Justice woke up in the Colosseum to find her grappling gun missing from her holster and a frightened soccer mum waving it at her. “I will kill you!”

The Hooded Justice understood instantly. Gladiatorial fight to the death with prisoners.

“Except you haven't, have you?” said the Hooded Justice as she got to her feet. “I was out cold, you took my gun. You could've killed me. But you didn't.”

The woman waved the gun. “I just want to go back home to Damian and the kids. I never wanted anything other than to get married, have 2.4 children and retire to Tuscany. I have a life to get back to.”

“I know.” said the Hooded Justice. “But let's be honest, you aren't going to fire that gun are you?”

The woman shook her head. “I will kill you. I need to get back to my husband.”

“I know.” said the Hooded Justice as she approached the woman slowly and carefully. “You know I'm married myself? She is so strong and so tough. I feel so safe around her. I mean I'm just a geek who dresses up for conventions but she? She keeps me right.”

The woman nodded. “My Damian's like that. He proposed atop the Eiffel Tower, dressed as Leonardo Davinci. I've gotta see him again.”

“I know.” said the Hooded Justice, inching ever closer. “And you'd kill to get back?”

The woman nodded and bit her lip. “I'm so sorry.”

“It's okay.” said the Hooded Justice, easily disarming the woman.

The woman burst into tears.

The Hooded Justice stowed the grappling gun then hugged the woman. “Hush. Hush. It's alright. I'm going to get home.” She snapped the woman's neck and declared. “Next time give me a real challenge!”

***

Theodora Lomanchi, noted elven Night Witch, champion of the battle of Ettersburg smirked as she looked at the sleeping orc. It was childish she knew and just a bit uncivilised to wait for a woman to wake up before you killed them but Theodora wanted to see the look of terror on her face as a dozen huge spells obliterated her.

Olaf Gamalzes woke up and stood up then was immediately hit with enough spells to turn her into a flaming pile of raspberry jam.

Theodora laughed. “Poor bastard.”

Olaf slowly pulled herself together as Theodora watched.

As she flexed her renewed limbs she said. “I'm a wereshark, bitch.” Then she threw herself at Theodora.

Theodora stood no chance as the orc ripped out her internal organs.

***

A tall charming beautiful dark skinned brunette was sitting beside Galla as she woke. “Pleasure to meet you, I'm Iris. I'm a journalist and part time superhero. I can rewind, pause or fast forward time. This is a gladiatorial contest whereby the loser gets fed to the rats and the winner gets imprisonment. What's your name?”

“Galla Placidia.” said Galla gently. “And I am so sincerely sorry but I did not go through all this just to throw my life away to let another young woman live. You'll have to kill yourself.”

“I'm sorry.” said Iris sadly.

“That knife you're hiding behind your back in case I try to kill you? Use it to slit your throat.” said Galla casually.

Iris laughed. “I'm not killing myself.”

Galla nodded. “I was worried you wouldn't but things really would be so much simpler and easier if you killed yourself. You might even live to be an asset to me in the future.”

Iris chuckled. “No, we're going to work together and get out of here.”

Galla sighed. “I'm sorry I don't like doing this but I must.”

Iris picked up the knife and slit her throat.

“Pro tip.” said Galla dryly. “Obey the elder gods. They have more powers than you can imagine.”

***

Butterfly woke up to find a small ginger kitten curled up beside her. She stroked thevkitten and asked. “Hey bunnikin, any idea where we are.”

“The Bam-Kursh said we are to fight to the death for the right to go to prison.” said the cat.

Butterfly laughed. “There is no such thing as talking cats or the Farsh-nuke would own so many and there would be at least one for every sylph in the entire multiverse.”

The cat nodded and walked away. She turned into a tall, dark skinned, and very beautiful woman. “Indeed Lucy Badass of the Sylph Liberation Front, you would be an authority on the subject of the Bam-Kursh. I am in fact a Mutite Shark. Technically hermaphroditic so fuck knows why I'm here but I guess my identifying as a woman and favouring this appearance may have tipped the scales. I call myself Bernice but you may call me Benny.”

Butterfly's jaw dropped as she got to her feet. “Bennykin, I swear upon all that I hold dear that I am now the champion of your species because Jesus Criminy Heck the Farsh-nuke needs to see this. A shark that can become a beautiful woman or a cat... I mean just look at you!”

Bernice nodded. “Thank you, I appreciate that you appreciate my species. Now tell me, do I have to kill you?”

Butterfly shook her head and retched.

After a moment Butterfly vomited up a small black ping pong ball, she threw it at the ground and Kitty, Flitzy and Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth The Second appeared armed with Plasma Rifles.

“Listen Bam-Cursed!” declared the Queen. “I am the one true sovereign of this land and these are my girls so back the fuck off unless you want a face full of Septagonoid shredding void rounds!”

Kitty checked her quantum oscillator. “I've located the prison, let's move.”

Flitzy, the Queen, Butterfly and Bernice followed Kitty to the prison. Doors sprang open and unlocked before them and soon Emilia, the Hooded Justice, Olaf and Galla joined them. Together they marched right up to the newly erected tower in the centre of Rome.

Snipers shot at Galla, The Hooded Justice and Butterfly moments before a thousand heavily armed soldiers appeared out of nowhere. The voice of the Bam-Kursh carried through speakers “Did you really think I wouldn't guard my own home? And thanks to your displays in the colosseum I know which ones to neutralise first. Those bullets you were shot with? They are programmed to hack into your souls and make you vulnerable. Hooded Justice, you are now autistic. Galla, you are trapped in your body. Butterfly, you are now effectively human. No triple threat, wereshark, fairy and sylph protection for you. Incidentally all three of you have been rigged with time bombs that will vaporise you in 24 hours unless you try to hurt me, in which case you'll be vaporised instantly.”

Emilia whispered to Butterfly. “Lucy is probably alive and kicking in the pit. I say discretion is the better part of valour.”

Butterfly nodded and cried out. “Fine! Just don't you dare send us all into the pit!”

***

They woke up in the pit to the sound of screaming.

Chapter 15
The Pit

Butterfly stirred from her slumber. She remembered the bolt of pain as a dart pierced her neck. She remembered an assassin telling her to enter the pit so they could rescue Lucy and then another bolt of pain as she was tranquillized, then her memory grew spotty.

She remembered the outnumbering solders swarming and stripping them. The muted cries and threats from her peers as weapons were taken away. She remembered the bite as tight metal handcuffs were secured around her wrists and ankles, the rattling of chains as her hands and feet were yoked together behind her back. She felt the shift of gravity as a crane was used to lift her up into the air and down into the pit.

She remembered the screaming and heat as they approached the bottom of the pit and the overwhelming smell of blood and rot. She remembered soldiers unloading her and her friends and carrying them like cargo to a rubbish chute set in a thick concrete wall. She remembered landing on what felt like glass and being carried. Then she blacked out.

Butterfly woke up to find herself wearing a crude leather skirt and tshirt. Her peers were similarly dressed, even the Queen. They were in a deep cavern open to sunlight. The floor was covered in a centimetre of sand or dust. A tall thick set woman with warts, scars and signs of fungal infection

was watching over them. She held a big stick that culminated in an end covered in what looked like human teeth.

“Where are we?” asked Butterfly.

The woman laughed. “You are kidding me?”

Butterfly groaned and started stretching. “So we're in the pit?”

The woman nodded. “Let me guess? Outsiders? You clubbed together to visit Rome and end this shit? You made it through the gladiatorial trials and made a play for the big tower? And now? Pahahaha! You're so screwed?”

Butterfly sighed. “So what do we do?”

The woman thought for a moment then said “Well now you have clothes and are awake to really feel the pain you get to go forward and donate your skin, bones and hair to other poor unfortunates who end up down here. Then you get to have a nice rest as you heal before you perform your duty to extract donations from other poor unfortunates and if you're really lucky and don't rapidly replace your lost bones and skin you are tortured and slowly carved away at to provide food for the other inmates and alternate with torturing your friends. And if you're really lucky and make others feel extreme pain without ruining their effectiveness as torturers you may get a big stick and the right to help run this pain machine.”

The colour drained from Butterfly's face, she hadn't thought anything could be worse than the conspiracy she helped dismantle but this was it. She vomited.

A short woman with a false leg made from someone's thigh bone walked forward flanked by two tall body builders who each had an arm missing.

The tall woman Butterfly had been speaking to spoke with the short woman. After a moment the short woman walked over to Butterfly.

Butterfly got to her feet and saluted. “You want me to make my donation, sir!”

The short woman laughed bitterly. “What limb do you want to donate?”

Butterfly answered. “Take my left leg”

The short woman nodded and the grunts with missing arms escorted Butterfly over to a bench made from skin stretched over bones.

Butterfly was laid in the bed.

A short ginger woman gave Butterfly a sad smile as she listened to the other short woman's instructions.

“I'm sorry,” said the ginger woman and she carved into Butterfly's flesh without anaesthetic, using knifes made from sharpened bone.

The ginger woman exposed the bones of Butterfly's leg and cauterised any bleeding by virtue of bone heated over fire. Then she carefully cut the tendons connecting her leg bones to her pelvis and

foot before she removed the leg bones. She carefully placed the leg bones to one side before she sliced off Butterfly's left foot, set that aside and severed the meat of Butterfly's left leg from her arse. The meat was set aside and Butterfly's wounds were cauterised then the ginger woman removed the skin from her arms and carefully removed her teeth one by one, cauterising the wounds as she went until at last Butterfly had her hair cut.

Butterfly was left to writhe in agony. Kitty, Galla and Nadine watched while the resources gained from her were ferried around to be made use of. Then Butterfly was carried over to and left in a dusty healing corner.

***

Butterfly woke to find a tall, very beautiful, dark skinned woman was stroking her hair. “Hey, honey, are awake?”

Butterfly tried to speak before she gave up and nodded.

The beautiful woman introduced herself. “My name is Iris and this is the healing corner.”

Butterfly wrote a message in the dust with her finger. “Why are you naked?”

Iris laughed. “Good question! I was left for dead in the gladiatorial arena so I didn't have to make a donation. The Unleasher says that as a result of that its not fair that I wear clothes but it's okay. She gave me a pill and now I don't feel the cold. She said I am to take special care of you and give you lots of cuddles and strokes as you are a kitten in human form. Is that right?”

Butterfly nodded and wrote in the dust. “Can I see her?”

Iris squeezed Butterfly. “No, silly, she's very busy but I can see if I can get a message to her if you'd like?”

Butterfly nodded.

Iris called out. “Lucy, get the Unleasher to come over here, please darling?”

Butterfly groaned and then she felt something stroking her left arm. She turned to see Galla, who had donated her left arm.

Nadine was dragged over, she'd donated her right leg.

Kitty had donated her left arm.

The Queen had donated her left leg.

Flitzy had donated her legs.

Olaf had donated her right arm.

Emilia had donated her left leg.

Bernice had donated her left leg.

They all cried in despair, especially the shape shifters who had the double whammy of being mutilated and having their souls scarred so they were locked in these bodies. Flitzy could no longer feel her connection to the magic force that pervades reality and felt as though this truly was hell.

Lucy came over, accompanied by the Unleasher.

Butterfly stared into the Unleasher's eyes and saw the man she'd last spoken to over a video feed on a septagonoid ship.

“Help me, Farsh-nuke.” She wrote.

***

Butterfly and the Unleasher were suddenly standing, restored to perfect health, in a chilled room lined with pressurized gas canisters linked up with valves and piping to racks of computing.

“What is this place?” asked Butterfly.

The Unleasher answered. “Something you need to see.”

William Dickson Wright paused for a moment, quietly drinking in the atmosphere. “Impressive.”

William walked to a computer terminal and started waving his Quantum Oscillator about, scanning things. He lets out a little bit of the gas to test and where it leaked, reality itself dissolved into a black void. William licked this tiny speck of nothingness.

William said. “Shit, this could actually work.”

The Farsh-nuke said “That’s bad.”

William said. “Let me just check something.”

William focused on the tip of his finger, turned it green then he used the Quantum Oscillator to blast a scraping of his illogicity into the void. The void grew larger.

Butterfly asked. “Why is William talking to himself?”

The Unleasher said. “He's talking to me, to the Farsh-nuke within himself. Notice the flickering of green in his eyes when the Farsh-nuke takes over.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “Shit.”

Butterfly said. “Oh yeah, I see now.

William said. “I am sorry, Lucy.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “That could obliterate everything.”

William said. “It would solve the problem, the final problem. I could solve it.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “Everything would cease to exist, to never have existed, time will be undone, everyone unborn.”

William said. “I could do it. Me. I could finally get something right for once.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “No, this is wrong. This is so wrong. This is the closest there has ever been or ever will be to pure evil.”

William said. “But it won’t ever have been.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “Lucy will die.”

William said. “She will cease to exist. That’s different.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “This can’t happen. I will not allow it to happen. I am many many horrific things but I can not let you do this, William.”

The Farsh-nuke plunged his hand into William’s chest and pulled out his heart.

William laughed. “I am a wereshark. I don’t need -”

The Farsh-nuke flashed with anger then picked up a glass vial containing close to pure logic. “If I smash this glass at our feet, we’ll dissolve, you and I. We’ll die together.”

William said. “You can’t.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “I can.”

William said. “Then do it.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “Alright, I will.”

The hand that held the vial utterly failed to budge.

William said “What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue?”

The Farsh-nuke said. “But that’s impossible! Absolutely impossible!”

William said. “That’s the problem with evil monsters. Always so naive about the clichés they are invoking.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “I am the great Farsh-nuke! The ever watchful spirit of chaos! It’s my job to protect the nothingness! This cannot be!”

William said. “I know right? And my little dog too? She totally didn’t trounce your powers of possession did she? You must have known? I told you, she got it from me.”

The Farsh-nuke said. “No. No, that’s too unbearable to think about.”

William said. “That you’ve been living with me at my discretion? I know, right? Isn’t it just the greatest? Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to come up with the final solution.”

William lowered the hand holding the vial and started agitating it with his Quantum Oscillator.

The scene vanished and switched to a younger Butterfly as she ran down a corridor.

She found a Septagonoid. A machine with clawed mechanical tentacles on each vertice of it's septagonal prism shape and piloted by a being of sapient logic.

She cried out. "Quick, take me hostage! William is in your bomb room right now! He will wipe you all out unless you send him a video message, right now, saying that you'll kill me if he doesn't stop plotting to save the multiverse and wipe out the Septagonoids!"

The Septagonoid asked. "Is your name, Lucy?"

"Yes." said the younger Butterfly.

The Septagonoid clarified. "Sister Lucille Badass?"

The younger Butterfly said. "That's me."

The Septagonoid said. "Whatever you say, Ma'am, just please don't kill me."

The scene shifted back to show William in the chilled room.

William held up a vial.

He cried out jubilantly. "I've done it! In this vial lies the answer to the oldest equation, the first equation, the equation that must never ever be solved! All I need do is break the glass of this vial and a chain reaction will begin. Time will be undone. Logic and illogicity will flatten out into a matt black void of silence. The classist view of nothingness will become actual canon for evermore!"

A buzzer sounded and a video feed of the younger Butterfly and the Septagonoid was projected onto a wall.

The Septagonoid said. "Listen, Mister William Dickson Wright, Farsh-nuke, Sir! If you do not stop trying to save the multiverse and wiping us out then I will eradicate your good lady friend here!"

"Oh, really?" said William acidly.

The Septagonoid said. "Indeed, Sir! I will give her the most painful death, Sir! Unless that is you stop trying to wipe us out so we can solve the final equation!"

William laughed. "I really don't take well to threats!"

William blew illogicity into the solution in the vial. "Shame really to ruin such a fine solution but the fuckers asked for it."

He smashed the vial on the ground then Tara materialised around him before hurriedly dematerialising.

The scene ended and Butterfly and the Unleasher were left stood in a green void.

The Unleasher hugged Butterfly. "You saved all of us. I owe you so very very much."

Butterfly nuzzled the Unleasher. "I've missed you so much you know? It's only been a month and a

half since I left you too. I'm all yours, if you want me?”

The Unleasher pulled back. “I won't lie. I want to, and I am still very protective of you but I am the Unleasher now. I gifted myself to the Bam-Kursh to end our feud and the bloodshed. At least that's what was supposed to happen. I'm not fit to care for myself, let alone another, but we will talk properly. I won't lie it will probably mean more pain for you in the long term but I need my Lucy fit and well.”

Butterfly nodded. “I understand, heal my friends too, won't you?”

The Unleasher sighed. “I can't make any promises. I can just about free your souls from the restrictions placed upon you by the Bam-Kursh but I can't regrow your skin and bones for you.”

Butterfly nodded. “I trust you.”

The Unleasher grinned and kissed Butterfly on the forehead.

Butterfly woke up back in the pit.

The Unleasher was leaning over her.

“Hush.” said the Unleasher as she closed Butterfly's eyelids and laid the palm of her right hand on Butterfly's chest. “Sleep and recover. I will wake you when we can chat.”

***

Butterfly woke after the deepest most pleasant sleep she had had in a long time. She yawned and stretched then realised her leg had regrown. She also realized her teeth were back.

Galla asked. “What did you give her to let us be so healed?”

Nadine and Emilia groaned.

Bernice said. “Any of you feel like helping your other friends?”

Flitzy said. “I have a make whole spell, I shall heal the humans.”

Kitty said. “Whatever you did, I'm glad you did it.”

Galla asked more seriously. “Butterfly, what the hell did you give her?”

Butterfly shrugged. “I was her pet before I was yours. Plus I did save the multiverse.”

Galla said. “I'm not letting you go, Butterfly. It's great that you've met up with you're old owner but you're mine now.”

Lucy bounded over. She wore a bikini. “Hey, Butterfly and Galla, you're better now. That's awesome. I tell you this Unleasher woman, she is the best owner ever. Iris doesn't even realise she's her pet because the Unleasher brings her under so quickly Iris just thinks she falls asleep in her arms.”

Galla said. “Oh yeah, I noticed her yesterday. I thought I killed her.”

Lucy and Butterfly stared at Galla.

Galla shrugged. “I had to get through the gladiatorial competition and she had a knife so I made her slit her own throat.”

Lucy said. “Your owner is scary”

Butterfly laughed.

Iris woke up from her position beside Butterfly. “Hey, you're awake and healed? The Unleasher must really like you.

Butterfly asked. “Iris, how would you like to join us? We're plotting rebellion and revolution.”

Iris said. “I'd love to but I'd want some clothes before I started shanking guards.”

Butterfly nodded. “Lucy, could you fetch the Unleasher please?”

Lucy nodded and bounded away.

Galla asked. “Do you have anybody to miss you at home, Iris?”

Iris stared at Galla.

Butterfly said. “What my friend means is – Well I'm her pet and Lucy's her pet and – Well, she thinks you would make a good pet.”

Iris looked confused. “I'm a journalist who can time travel. I am not a pet.”

Galla said. “No, but you would be a very valuable asset.”

The Unleasher appeared behind Iris. “She's going to go back home to her family in central city and all of this will be but an unpleasant memory.”

Butterfly stared at the Unleasher, she knew that stance, it was the same William adopted when strange men had offered to buy her off William. It was a very protective and dominant posture.

Galla said. “If you want Iris to not get involved I suggest you send her to help the other injured.”

The Unleasher caught the threat and nodded for Iris to go.

Butterfly said. “Farsh-nuke meet the elder god behind this Venus Trap, otherwise known as Galla Placidia.”

The Unleasher said dryly. “How annoyed would you be if I murdered her?”

Galla glared at the Unleasher. “The Farsh-nuke as I live and breathe, I wondered when you'd turn up. I rather assumed you'd be a man.”

The Unleasher smiled and asked icily. “Do you really want to do this?”

Galla smiled and said acidly. “Oh, I would love to.”

Nadine said dryly. “Galla, please don't kill the woman who has let us have our teeth back.”

Galla grimaced. “Dammit! My host won't let me make a move towards you.”

The Unleasher chuckled. “Yeah, it is a bitch when they assert agency over their own body, isn't it?”

Galla turned and kissed Nadine. “Fuck me, you beautiful woman.”

Butterfly asked curiously. “Do you know her?”

The Unleasher shrugged. “It's been a long time since I was an elder god out in the wild, I might not remember. Anyway how about you, you good?”

Butterfly nodded. “So what happened to you, to make you into a woman?”

The Unleasher lay down beside the Butterfly. “The Unleasher was a real woman. A resistance fighter for the Sylph Allied Liberation Front, she built a very clever bomb to make me feel what it was to be a woman.”

“And now you're running hell?” asked Butterfly as she looked meaningfully at the Unleasher.

The Unleasher raised an eyebrow. “How did you know?”

“Well for starters you have access to sylph pills to turn Iris but more importantly this is an economy that farms and exploits women as resources. If anybody else was running a torture system then they'd get hot coals, a rake and maybe some chains but otherwise they'd be left to rot. This system as crude and cruel as it is gives people clothes, weapons, soap and other things that can be made from harvesting women.” explained Butterfly.

The Unleasher nodded and lay back in the dust, staring into space. “The Bam-Kursh said he knew I would try to overthrow her if I wasn't kept busy so she locked me up in this pit and said I could get access to basic food and resources if I tortured any women he sent down here. The less resources I ask of him, the better resources I can get and the more women scream and suffer, the more of a free hand I am given.”

Butterfly sighed. “The man who founded the conspiracy to eat sylphs for the supposed good of all becomes the woman responsible of running hell for the actual good of all.”

The Unleasher nodded. “No greater torture for me than that.”

Butterfly squeezed the Unleasher's hand. “Hey, this place is clean, the women are clothed and you are slowly militarising the place. It's a success.”

The Unleasher said without emotion. “If your plan doesn't work I'm going to have to farm you and your friends. We need the resources and you need to suffer.”

Butterfly rolled over and hugged the Unleasher. “It's alright, we'll get out of here.”

The Unleasher broke down in tears. “I really don't want to harvest from Iris. I just want one person to make it through this place without being tortured.”

Butterfly nuzzled the Unleasher. “You know the other Lucy is a me from another universe where she got turned into a sylph by the Great Farsh-nuke?”

The Unleasher nodded. “The weight that's on that woman's shoulders, I don't know how she can bare it.”

Butterfly couldn't think of anything else to say so she just hugged the Unleasher until the tears went away.

Galla spoke up. “I know where to find our clothes.”

The Unleasher stared at her. “Where?”

Galla shut her eyes for a moment and said. “They're in the soldier enclosure, they can be thrown down the rubbish chute at any time. I just need to give the word.”

“Okay.” said the Unleasher curiously. “How?”

Galla shrugged. “It's the Venus Trap. My soul scattered throughout the multiverse. That's what bought you all here, I'm trying to rebuild myself. Fortunately while I was off the grid the other parts of my soul that were large enough worked to help us. Now how are we going to do this? I think we should send Butterfly.”

“No, I'll go.” said the Unleasher.

“Do you normally collect the rubbish? If you don't then you risk ruining everything. Butterfly is a known adversary of the Bam-Kursh so there's plausible deniability and she's a wereshark and a fairy so she can stand to make the mission.” said Galla.

“I am not letting you put her in danger.” said the Unleasher sternly.

“Give the word.” said Butterfly as she started running.

Galla glared at the Unleasher.

The Unleasher grumbled. “Give the word.”

Butterfly ran across the pit, hurdled the sick and the fallen and dodged guards that lashed out with their sticks. She made it to the bottom of the chute and found the bundle of clothes laying atop a large metal catch area that had been covered in teeth. She grabbed the clothes and ran back.

Galla and the Unleasher were screaming at each other when Butterfly returned.

Butterfly handed over the clothes. “Would you two stop tearing into one another? I got it done and once we're ready I think you'll find we can be more than a match for the Bam-Kursh.”

“See, I told you.” said Galla pointedly.

The Unleasher glared at Galla. “Fine.”

“Fine, what?” asked Butterfly.

The Unleasher took the clothes from Butterfly and handed them to Iris. “Go hide these somewhere safe.”

Butterfly stared at the Unleasher. “What is it? What were you arguing about?”

“Whether our cover is worth so much.” whispered the Unleasher then she grabbed Butterfly's arm and took her over to the short ginger woman.

The ginger woman said. “Unleasher, you don't normally take people to make their donations?”

The Unleasher shook her head and swallowed before she took a deep breath and yelled. “Silence rabble!”

The chatter and the screams stopped.

The Unleasher cried. “You all know me! You all know how much I help you and look after you! Well this is what happens when you try to escape! Sister Lucille Danse of the Sylph Liberation Front you are to be harvested of all your organs, bones and skin while still alive without pain relief! Your regeneration has been stopped and you shall suffer a slow and lingering death for the benefit of all!”

Butterfly cried out in shock and pain as the Unleasher walked away and the ginger woman laid her onto the operation table.

The Unleasher walked back to Galla and Butterfly's friends and said dryly. “There is nothing you can say that will be a patch on how I feel about myself right now.”

The Unleasher slumped against the wall of the pit and sobbed into Butterfly's still beating heart.

*

Chapter 16
The Final Battle

Butterfly woke from a deep sleep completely relaxed and refreshed. She was in the hamster cage with Lucy and Iris. Lucy wore a suit and Iris wore trousers and a tshirt.

“Hey!” called Butterfly. “What happened!?”

Lucy strode over to kneel beside Butterfly and said. “I'm sorry. I had no part in it but I heard what happened. You ran forward and retrieved everyone's clothes and armour. You broke the rules and blew our cover. The Unleasher wanted to act right then but Galla decided that it would be better to lay low for a month sowing seeds of discord and training everyone how to fight.”

“Right.” said Butterfly uncertainly. “Then what happened?”

“You really don't remember?” asked Lucy.

“No.” said Butterfly. The hairs standing up on the back of her neck made her realise something. She reached her left hand up to her neck and her face contorted in horror as she felt around her neck in desperation/ “Lucy, where's my collar?”

Lucy swallowed. “The Unleasher had to make an example of you to maintain our cover. She walked you over to the donation bed and ordered that you be harvested completely. He removed one of your hearts before removing she removed your regenerative capabilities.”

Butterfly's jaw dropped in horror. “I'm – I mean – I've lived with my head being exploded, I have had hearts torn out and eaten. Regardless of whether I remember it or not. I would have felt that betrayal and slow agonising death. Christ, I want to vomit.”

“Hush.” said Lucy as she stroked Butterfly. “You're not supposed to get distressed.”

“Not supposed to get distressed? I was dissected alive!” cried Butterfly incredulously.

Lucy nodded sadly. “They wanted to lie to you, alter your mind and pretend something less horrific had happened. Said it would be kinder. I said that was a crock of shit and they just didn't want you to think ill of them. I threatened to sacrifice myself and Iris if they wanted to lie to you. That was sufficient leverage to make the elder gods reconsider and keep all three of us in your hamster cage ping pong ball. The Unleasher has your collar if you ever want it back.”

“And Kitty?” asked Butterfly.

Lucy's face darkened. “Kitty, Galla, Emilia and Bernice are harvested daily. Nadine and the Queen are allowed out of being harvested because they are guards.”

Butterfly grimaced. “And it's been a month?”

“Yeah...” said Lucy awkwardly “Oh and my severed leg grew into another clone of me. Emilia's taking care of her and has named her Artemis. She's also been harvested. Look, do you want to have a shower?”

Butterfly nodded and followed Lucy out one of the tubes.

Iris watched them go and spoke into her Logicio ear piece. “The Butterfly has taken the bait. Repeat, the Butterfly has taken the bait. Unleasher, we are go for assembly. Repeat we are go for assembly.”

***

Butterfly and Lucy returned to find Iris giggling.

Butterfly approached Iris. “Hey girl, ever fancied a threesome?”

Lucy burst out laughing.

Iris spoke into her bluetooth. “We are go for drop.”

***

Lucy, Butterfly and Iris appeared before Galla and the Unleasher.

“I'm sorry.” said the Unleasher.

“We're both sorry.” said Galla seriously. “But you are an asset and now you are ready for war.”

“Look around you.” said Iris.

General Galbion, Diamonte, Judith, Lily, Galbion's Right Hand woman, Olaf Gamalzes, Emilia Auditorie the SALFy, Bernice the mutite shark, Greta the cyborg shark, Kitty, The Queen, The Hooded Justice, Flitzy, the orcs, the fairies, the Plasticlones, the Valkyries, the asylum seekers and the victims of the pit... They all stood, fully healed and recovered, armed to the teeth waiting for orders.

Galla said. “This is why I did that to you. To give you an army with which to defeat the Bam-Kursh and end the suffering.”

“Freeing you as a consequence.” said Butterfly coldly.

“Naturally.” said Galla with a smile.

“Is this what it is to be a weapon, Farsh-nuke?” asked Butterfly bitterly.

The Unleasher shrugged. “I grew from a heart when the Bam-Kursh tried to kill me so long ago, remember?”

Butterfly nodded. “And how do we get out of the pit?”

“Fly.” said Galla calmly. “We will follow”

Butterfly nodded.

Lucy kissed her on the cheek. “Fly well and maybe we'll meet again.”

Butterfly swallowed, removed her plasma rifle from a pocket and flew.

Butterfly flew up out of the pit and down to the front door of the Bam-Kursh's tower without being noticed or noticing anything odd. When she touched the ground though, all hell broke loose...

***

Galla and the Unleasher appeared either side of Butterfly, Quantum Oscillators aimed and working away at the door. Lucy and Greta appeared either side of Butterfly, guarding Galla and the Unleasher. Iris and the Hooded Justice protected their flanks.

General Galbion and half the orcs, Plasticlones, asylum seekers and victims of the pit appeared guarding the road to the right.

Diamonte and the other half of the orcs, Plasticlones, asylum seekers and victims of the pit appeared guarding the road to the left.

Olaf led a group comprising Galbion's Right Hand woman, Judith, 2 weresharks and a fairy as they mowed down down the enemy behind their battle lines to the right.

Emilia led Artemis, the Queen, 2 weresharks and a fairy as they took out fighters behind enemy lines to the left.

Lily, Kitty and Bernice controlled the battlefield by listening into intelligence gained through blood control and using calculated attacks to thin out the enemy in areas of weakness and bunch them up where they could be most easily killed.

Flitzy maintained ultimate authority over the fairies and managed how many fairies were allocated to any specific task at a given time. Be it replenishing the ammo and health of the allies, using shock and awe to distract and confuse the enemies or focusing fire in a specific area to save a unit under heavy fire.

Butterfly cast shield spells to protect and buff her friends but between shield spells a lucky shot exploded Iris's head and the Hooded Justice staggered back, injured.

Shunk!

The door opened.

Vwoorp!

The Cowboy and 50 Architects of Chaos appeared.

The Cowboy cried “Get the Bam-Kursh!” and turned to shoot at the enemy behind him.

The Unleasher picked Butterfly up and carried her inside.

Galla followed and shut the door behind them.

***

Inside the tower was a spiral stair case leading up and down.

The Unleasher started heading up

Galla said. “We go down.”

“Why?” asked Butterfly. “The Bam-Kursh is at the top of the tower.”

Galla nodded. “And the Unleasher will provide a satisfactory distraction but we can't hope to beat him until I have met the other Galla and freed myself. Now, go downstairs.”

Butterfly sighed and headed downstairs followed by Galla.

“I really hope I don't have to kill you.” said Butterfly sadly.

“Likewise” said Galla.

At the bottom they found a short skinny dark skinned woman.

“Hello.” She said. “I am Galla Placidia, Regent for Emperor Valentian the third. Would someone please explain to me what the hell is going on?”

Galla said. “Ever had strange dreams or nightmares? Felt that your thoughts or actions were not your own? That you can remember things you have never done? I chose you, Galla, as I chose this

woman here to be my Butterfly. My soul lies shattered across all the women I have bought to this plane of existence and now I shall rise.”

The Regent of Rome said. “Yes. Yes, I see now. What must we do?”

Galla kissed the Regent of Rome on the lips playfully then pulled back to say. “How else is a god born?”

Butterfly asked nervously. “Why did you bring me along here?”

The Regent of Rome stared at Butterfly and smiled.

Galla said. “I need energy to perform this ritual. I need life force. You have it in abundance and that will leave me free to take out the Bam-Kursh.”

Butterfly nodded slowly. “And since I am no one's pet after what you did, there is no socio-cultural stigma to this. And I suppose there are worse ways to have your life energy drained.”

***

The Unleasher had been stripped and her hand and legs were cuffed together behind her back to let her hang from a crane as a pinata. The Bam-Kursh was slashing at her with his sword cane.

“I just think we can murder bad guys.” said the Unleasher.

The Bam-Kursh laughed. “The innocent and the good are much more fun to torture, to feel their joy and idealism obliterated by pain!”

Whack!

The Unleasher flinched. “I'll let you possess me. Just please let them live.”

Galla strode in, her eyes green. With a wave of her hand the chains holding the Unleasher to the crane melted away and Unleasher was pulled to her right hand.

“Nice pinata, I might have to have a swing myself some time.” said Galla casually.

The Bam-Kursh glared at her. “How dare you? The Farsh-nuke is my property, he sold herself to me!”

Galla cackled. “You really don't remember me, do you, Bam-Kursh? Well, maybe this will jog your memory.”

Galla held her open hand before her and started squeezing thin air. “Shut up.”

The Bam-Kursh started suffocating. “Mummy!”

Galla grinned. “Who keeps the monsters from your space? Mother. Who tells the bad guys to behave? Mother. Who makes you do the unpleasant things for the greater good? Mother. I'm back, Bam-Kursh, and I have had enough of your games. Go! To! Your! Body!”

The spirit of the Bam-Kursh fled Flavia Galla and she collapsed.

“Go see to Butterfly.” said Galla as she chased after the spirit of the Bam-Kursh.

The Unleasher pulled on her clothes and headed downstairs where the blissed out Regent of Rome and Butterfly stripped her again.

***

When Butterfly, the Unleasher and the regent of Rome finally opened the doors they saw a blood bath.

The Cowboy, Lucy and Greta were both shot up and bleeding heavily. The Hooded Justice and Iris were dead.

The right flank were all but dead. Galbion and her Right Hand woman had been vaporised. Judith lay dying as a fairy saw to her, Olaf was fine since she was a wereshark and had played conservatively when she needed to.

The left flank was equally demolished. Diamonte's head had exploded and Emilia and Artemis had ultimately died protecting the Queen who was being seen to by a fairy.

Lily and Bernice died but Kitty survived just and was being seen to by a group of fairies.

Flitzy landed on Butterfly's shoulder. “I saved some of them, well their memories and a sample of their dna. You will have to extract them from me. I am not long for this world.”

Butterfly nodded and mind melded with Flitzy then with a last gasp Flitzy died in her arms.

Butterfly broke down crying.

The Unleasher hugged her and tried to pretend that everything would be alright but she felt hollow inside too.

Thunk!

Gfaxxy Quluwmcy stepped out of a rocket and said. “We will take you to our ship and give you somewhere to live while you grieve. We will also clear up this mess.”

Galla strode up. “Good. That's the Bam-Kursh dealt with. May I join you?”

The Unleasher stepped between Galla and Butterfly. “I don't care if it is not my right, I don't care if you are more powerful than me, I care a great deal for this woman and all you have done is cause her pain. No more.”

Galla chuckled. “Farsh-nuke, really?”

The Unleasher lifted Galla up by the collar. “I have murdered the ones I love, I have eaten people and I have crushed their souls into dirt. I have more blood on my hands than you will ever know and you make me sick. Cut the crap or I will end you!”

Galla asked Butterfly. “Is she serious?”

Butterfly nodded. “She killed me, remember?”

Galla swallowed. “Okay, maybe I should look at modifying my ego but please don't kill me, I can be an asset in the war.”

Lucy laughed. “Gfaxxy take us away.”

***

The next two days were spent recovering from the final battle. Olaf, Kitty, The Cowboy, The Queen, Lucy, Greta and Butterfly grew close as they shared their stories of the battle and commiserated. The Regent of Rome drank with them as she shared her tale of the saga. The Unleasher and Galla spent those two days having very heated discussions in the bar.

By the third day the Unleasher went over to speak to the others and was soon singing karaoke and playing poker with the others.

On the morning of the fourth Butterfly went over to the Unleasher at breakfast and said. “I know why you're here, shall we try it?”

The Unleasher nodded and they started working away in the hologram suite.

A month later the Unleasher led everyone into the suite for the grand reveal.

They pulled away the curtain and everyone marvelled at three women in glorified refrigerators.

“Presenting the Hooded Justice, Iris Timeweaver and Emilia Auditorie.” said the Unleasher.

The Queen asked. “Can I get an Emilia for my country? She's very skilled.”

The Unleasher nodded.

Lucy asked. “And if I wanted an Iris for reasons of my own?”

Galla entered, cheeks red, she teared up and hugged the Unleasher and Butterfly.

The next day Gfaxxy approached Galla and said. “Look we need to go, nothing against you, just this whole war thing. So can we sort stuff out.”

Galla nodded and then she got the Regent of Rome, Lucy and Butterfly in a room with her “So who wants me?”

The Regent of Rome said. “I could use your power.”

Lucy nodded in agreement. “I can't run everything and I don't have experience of it so this Galla Placidia will aid me in my mission.”

Butterfly nodded. “They need someone like you. They need an ultimate pragmatist. Galla, I and the Unleasher just want to travel and help people.”

The elder god known as Mother moved into the Regent of Rome and said. “Then it is agreed, we make preparations to leave.”

***

Galla, Butterfly, Kitty, Olaf and the Unleasher took 2 clones of Iris, 2 clones of Emilia, 1 clone of the Hooded Justice, and the Queen.

Gfaxxy, The Elder God Galla, Lucy, Greta and the Cowboy took a clone of Emilia and the Hooded Justice with them and the cloning boothes.

As they were about to leave and the elder god Galla on Gfaxxy's ship was gathering up everybody for the move back to their respective times and places she felt something odd and pulled it aboard.

Amy materialised. “Hi guys, what did I miss?”

Lucy started laughing.

***

Butterfly and the Unleasher's ship dropped off one of the clones of Iris back in her old life then they dropped off the Queen with one of the Emilia clones and stopped by Woking.

They found out Uni had fallen to her death when Woking had vanished and Galla was heart broken until Nadine invited Sandra round and shut the door of the spaceship before she could leave.

“It's bigger on the inside” said Sandra.

“Yes it is” said Galla. “Now allow me to introduce my friends. Gal with wings there is Butterfly. The one in back is the Hooded Justice or Nadine. The one who looks a bit like a boulder is Olaf Gamalzes. The shadowy figure in the cosplay is Emilia Auditorie, a resistence fighter from a far future parallel universe and the women reclining on the sofa are Kitty, Amy and Iris. We are the Venusian Cavalry. Now answer me one simple question: All of reality, every universe there ever was, every star, every planet, every time, where do you want to start?”

Sandra swallowed and made her answer.

The door that wasn't there before was no longer there again. The Venusian Cavalry were off on another adventure.